

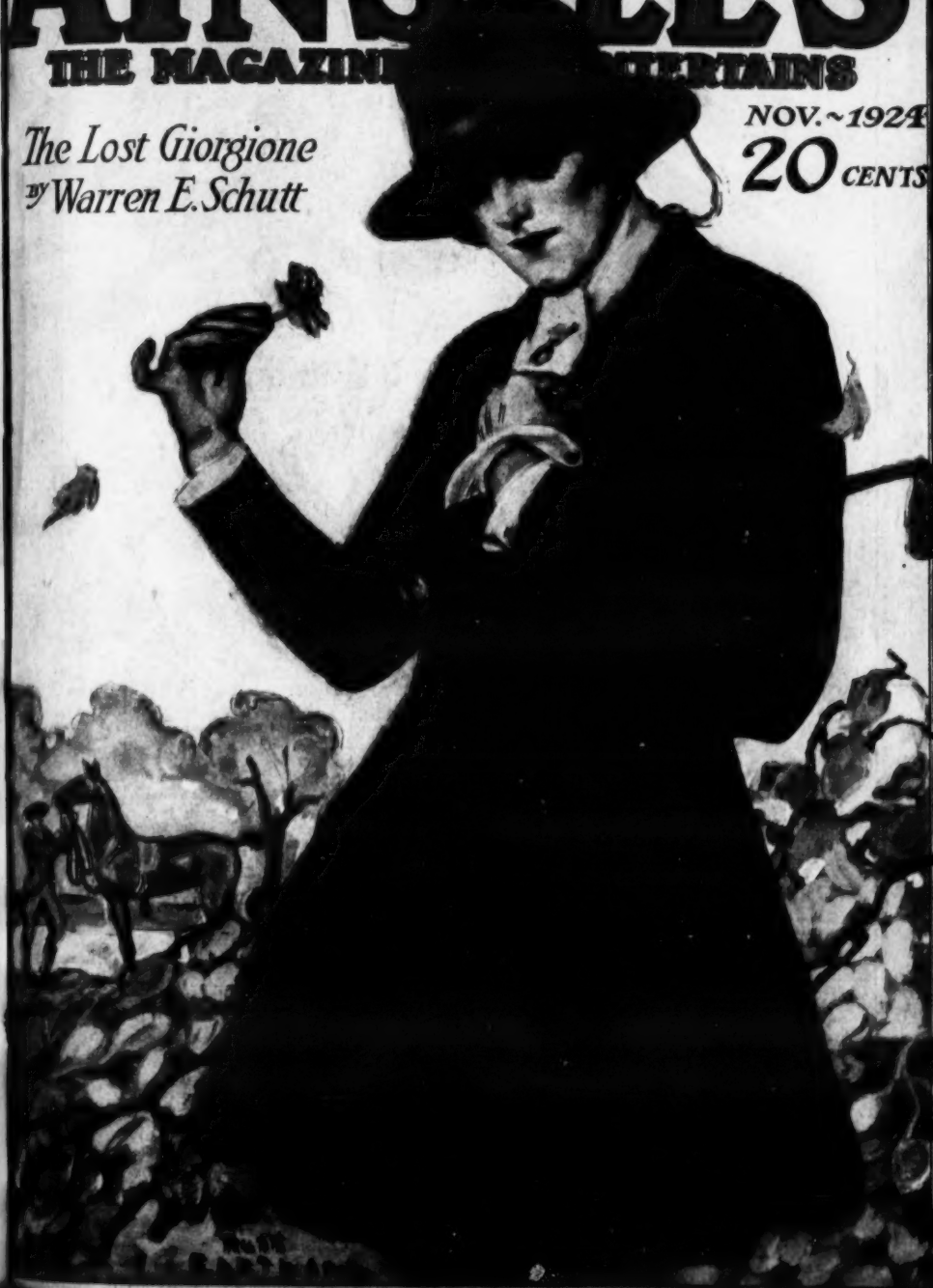
AINSLIE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

NOV. ~ 1924

20 CENTS

The Lost Giorgione
by Warren E. Schutt





Announcing The New Pettijohn's WHOLE WHEAT CEREAL


AFTER a long time spent in making it just right, here is the finest Whole Wheat Cereal Food ever produced—the New PETTIJOHN'S. Its popularity is bound to be *quick, complete, and permanent*—because—

Finest of Whole Wheat—the New Pettijohn's gives you *all* the wheat, pre-cooked, processed to develop the flavor, rolled, and delicately toasted.

Quick Cooking—the New Pettijohn's cooks *through* and *through* in 3 to 5 minutes.

Served Hot—the New Pettijohn's makes a generous, grateful breakfast—often times a welcome change for luncheon—and the finest of hot suppers for growing children.

25 Per Cent Natural Bran—the New



1. Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes.
2. The pick of America's Wheat—contains 25% Natural Bran, with essential Vitamines and Mineral Salts.
3. A new and delicious Flavor brought out by pre-cooking.

Pettijohn's brings you Natural Bran in a shape that you can *enjoy*. Every taste of the New Pettijohn's is *mellow and rich*, and gives you the gentle laxative benefit of good bran.

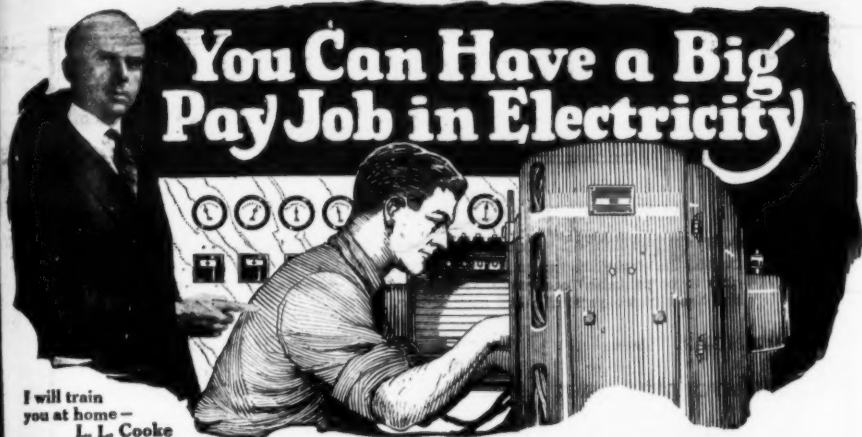
Vitamines and Mineral Salts—the New Pettijohn's brings you all the Vitamines, Lime, Iron and Phosphorus of the Whole Wheat.

Appetizing—eat the New Pettijohn's fresh and hot, with good top-milk or cream, and the flavor is something to be grateful for

TRY IT—TASTE IT—TELL YOUR FRIENDS
At your Grocer's—A Generous Package.

The Quaker Oats Company

CHICAGO, U.S.A.



You Can Have a Big Pay Job in Electricity

I will train
you at home —
L. L. Cooke

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Get in line for one of these "Big-Pay Jobs" by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

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The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

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November
1924

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. LIV
No. 3

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Cook in 3 to 5 minutes

The kind you have always known

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"I HAVE just stepped from the scales and was overjoyed to find that the hand pointed to 142 pounds.

"Previously I found that no matter how I tried I could not bring my weight below 165 pounds. I was hopeless. I did not bother, thinking it useless. Finally, being so uncomfortable in heavy bone corsets I decided to try the Madame X Girdle for comfort if nothing else.

"During June and July I wore it constantly as it improved my appearance immensely. I noticed that I was gradually getting smaller. My friends say I look years younger, having lost 23 pounds with a decided improvement in health.

"I am three or four inches thinner in waist and hips.

"Everyone has noticed the change. I shall continue to wear my girdle as it is so extremely comfortable."

[signed] Anne L. Kenney,
509 W. 170th St., New York.

Miss Kenney's experience is by no means unique. Women everywhere write us enthusiastically to tell us of amazing reductions which this marvelous girdle has quickly brought about.

several inches thinner at the waist and hips without the slightest discomfort. And day by day, as you wear the girdle, it gently kneads away the excess fat and moulds your figure to new beauty and slender grace.

Women usually lose from one to three inches the very first week, and almost before you know it, four, five and sometimes even ten inches have disappeared for good from waist, hips, thighs, and you look and feel younger and better.

Physicians endorse it

The Madame X is based on scientific principles of reduction by rubber massage, long advocated by health authorities and professional athletes. The rubber is scientifically cured by the dry heat method, so it will be specially strong and resilient.

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Miss
Anne L.
Kenney
after
reducing
23
pounds
with her
Madame
X

good store where corsets are sold. Insist on the original patented Madame X.

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Sale Price Complete ~~\$45.00~~ \$34.85



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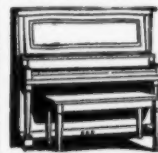
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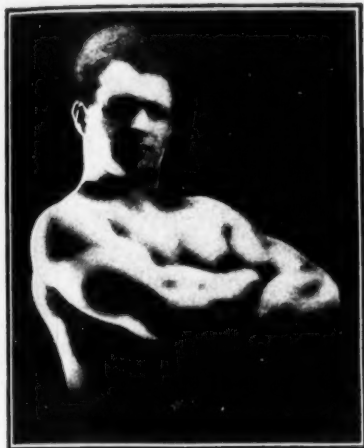
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3. The inhalation of pungent soap perfumes frequently unsteadies the hand that signs the checks.

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2. Ivory lather rinses with the ease and promptness of a ten-dollar bill departing from your wallet in a Broadway restaurant.
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AINSLIEE'S

VOL. LIV.

NOVEMBER, 1924.

No. 3.



The Lost Giorgione

By Warren E. Schutt

Author of "Assarian, Superman,"
"The Little Silver Crucifix," etc.



CHAPTER I.

FOR nearly a year, now, Corona Strickland had found peace and serenity, sanctuary if not fullness of life, in that rugged pile of masonry called by no other name than Forli, the storied medieval stronghold of the ducal family of that name, that for centuries has stood a solitary and impregnable guard over one of the passes from the Roman Campagna into the Abruzzi. She had had need of such a haven, with its austerity, its solitude, its strength as of eternity; never more need, it seemed to her, than when fortune threw in her way the opportunity to rent it.

Her fleeing from Walbridge Kent—yes, it amounted to that—straight to a fortuitous encounter with Guido Maravene in Paris, whom fate had thus malevolently thrust back into her life after ten years, had seemed to her a climax which she had not strength enough to live through as life must be

lived. Not that she was a coward, or a weakling, or even a mystic attracted by the romance of the idea of retreat from the world. She was, on the contrary, as strong as she was lovely, as practical of mind as she was great of heart. If there had been any real need of going on whither life led her, she could have done it; but there seemed to her no such necessity. And suddenly, after the disagreeable meeting with Maravene in Paris, she felt very tired of it all.

She did need the rest, physically and mentally if not so much spiritually; for during the past ten years, in an effort to blot out Guido Maravene, she had forgotten that she was rich, and had applied herself with unrelenting and desperate concentration to her profession, not so much to achieve the distinction which so eminently she had achieved, as to furnish some sane and permissible outlet for that strong, restive mind and spirit of hers, after the fiasco of her affair with Maravene.

An eminent distinction hers amounted to, even if it was not of popular repute. There were few worth-while houses in New York, or its better suburbs, which did not contain evidences of her skill and art and judgment in decoration. And in fact—though the fact is not important—it was the pursuit of her profession, the examination and possible purchase of certain reputed Aubussons, that led her in the first place across Guido Maravene's path again, and secondly to Forli. There, having seen Forli, having come to know the withered, patrician old duchess of the name—the last of her line save an unworthy, mostly absent son—Corona begged to be allowed to rent the east wing for a year. She did not return to America. She closed her affairs in so far as she could by mail, and stayed on at Forli.

A delightful sanctuary it had been, and was still for the most part, though lately her restive spirit chafed against the waste. Like all feudal castles, Forli, built at the top of the most precipitous slope the mountain afforded, was more fortress than dwelling—especially the old middle part facing the flagged court, which frowned like a massive, granite bastion. Forli of more peaceable times had added great balconies, columned porticoes, and two enormous wings flanking the paved courtyard; had terraced and made formal gardens on the less precipitous side, along which a hard, white road led up from the village, meandering at a gentle pitch through vineyards and olive groves.

Parts of Forli were, of course, bleak and dismal in their austerity; especially the middle part, and the west wing, built out almost to the cliff's edge and back against the poplar-shaded mountain side. But the east wing overlooked the green of the terrace and the gardens; it overlooked a vista of the lower foothills of the Abruzzi, down into the

purple haze that overhung the Roman Campagna; it breasted first the freshening sweep of storm, and caught and held unto itself all the sun of every day. In this wing, in the magnificent cloistral calm of its vaulted chambers and spacious suites, amidst frescoes and tapestries and ancient furniture and hangings, such as charmed her professional eye, Corona Strickland lived out her thirty-fourth year; a year of self-imposed rest that was really no rest, of getting away from that which could not be got away from, only to find at the end that her love for Walbridge Kent was as great as when she sought to run away from it.

That this last was true, not even Corona knew before the unannounced and, of course, wholly unexpected arrival at Forli of Kent's nineteen-year-old daughter Barbara. She came on one of those matchless afternoons of May, when Corona was lazily sipping tea under a laurel tree on the terrace. She had heard the car come up the road, and stop in the courtyard, but gave to it no thought beyond the assumption that the *duchessa's* son Georgio had come to pay her an infrequent visit.

The duchess herself—slender, erect, and bright of eye in spite of her seventy years—brought out to her the news of Corona's first caller in all the time she had been there, as if it were an event too important to be intrusted to a servant.

"An American girl, beautiful, charming, *simpatica*," explained the duchess, joyfully anticipating Corona's pleasure.

"Incredible!" was all that Corona could say.

The *duchessa's* face fell.

"You do not wish to see her? She is not a friend of yours?" she asked in disappointment.

"A friend?" Corona laughed, suddenly very happy. "Rather more than that, I should say. I almost brought her up."

"Oh! A relative?" The *duchessa's* light inquisitiveness was, somehow, always a compliment, betokening only a vital interest in one as a friend.

"No, not even a relative. Her father's country place adjoins mine at home. And, of course, I am very glad to see her. At first, I was astounded that she could have come to me. I wasn't even aware that she knew where I am. Let us go and see her."

Corona found her in that vast, gloomy reception hall of the old fortress remodeled—a tall, lithe, restive girl, excessively pretty in real fact but careless of it, of whom one could judge that maturity and awakening would make a splendid woman. Corona felt a flash of pride upon seeing her, considering how much of herself had gone to the making of Barbara Kent what she was. For Barbara, completely lacking any sympathy or respect for her silly, shallow mother, even before she entered her teens, had looked to Corona, her nearest neighbor, for all she needed of maternal counsel and influence. And Corona had lavished herself on Barbara, finding here her sole outlet for her natural maternal instinct.

There was a quick scurry of feet, and the two women embraced.

Barbara first found speech:

"Corona, whatever possessed you to do this?"

"This? What?" Corona smiled.

"This is a convent, isn't it? Or something equally bad? So gloomy. Like a tomb. Convents are, aren't they?"

"Are what?"

"Tombs."

"I don't know. I've never been in one. And this isn't really gloomy. You've already met the *duchessa*?"

The girl and the old duchess exchanged greetings on a basis more intimate than they had done on their first meeting. Then Corona took Barbara through the wing, out on the columned

portico that flanked the east side, whence one overlooked the gardens, and the maze of interlacing, ever-lowering hills. Here, sheltered from the heat of the afternoon sun, they walked up and down on the cool marble floor, not with rapid pace, but both of them with the sure grace and restraint of gesture that characterizes such women.

"Imagine your finding me here," Corona began.

"Am I not welcome? Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Did your reception tell you a different tale?" Corona parried with a smile. "If it lacked anything, it was only because of the surprise."

"But why did you run away? Why did you leave us all? And I've needed you so much."

Corona parried this question as well, but this time without a smile.

"I needed a vacation. And I've kept up with no one."

"Yes, of course you needed the rest. You've always worked so hard."

"How did you find me out?"

"We're in Rome, you know—father and I. I cabled home for your address after we got here. I didn't even know you were in Italy. I suddenly had to see you, Corona."

"And you motored up from Rome?"

"Yes; a beast of a trip. Hired car, too. Do you so much disapprove? It has its dangers, I suppose, skating around this country with a hired chauffeur. But the embassy—did you know, by the way, that Bobby Forrest is an attaché there?—that essential part of the embassy arranged it all for me. You see, I couldn't let father know I was coming. It had to be managed discreetly."

Corona was inextricably puzzled at that.

"Why couldn't you let him know you were coming to me?" she asked. "And why didn't he come with you?"

"That's what I've come to tell you

about. Father's in a bushel of trouble, and doesn't even know it. And he's gone so far with it that no one can tell him so. No one but you has any more influence over him. I've come to you for help."

"Go on."

"The point is, you see, the woman's a wrong one, and I know it. And he is simply——"

"The woman? Your father is divorced at last?" Corona asked in a quick breath.

She was conscious that Barbara looked at her now in sudden question—a question aroused, undoubtedly, by the intonation of her counter question. For not Barbara, not even Walbridge Kent himself, not any one, knew of her love for Kent. It was an affair which, under the circumstances, a woman such as she was would keep to herself. It had not come to her as a sudden flaming, devastating passion, nor was it likely to, considering her years and experience and self-possession. Rather it had been a slow, strong growth. From the time she bought Fernwood, adjacent to the Kents' estate, she had found herself in a neighborly intimacy that soon developed into a peculiar sympathy with Kent and his daughter.

Kent was of gentle, rather studious nature, although he was very fond of his horses and golf and all the rest of country life. The inheritor of a considerable fortune, he had no desire to do more than conserve it and administer it wisely; and for the rest he preferred to devote himself to such pursuits as would add to his naturally fine tastes, with the result that, though he never achieved distinction in any line, he was as keen and as profound a critic of literature and music and of the fine arts generally, as any professional, and an historian of no mean understanding.

But in all these things there was no companionship nor even sympathy between himself and his wife, whom he

had married while he was still at Harvard. She, shallow, lazy, existing only on excitement and constant change, found the life he chose too irksome for her, and left him frequently for increasingly long periods.

Their disagreements were not publicly known. Corona never more than felt them instinctively, even when Mrs. Kent was at home, and she saw them together. Mrs. Kent never manifested nor spoke of objection to Corona's intimacy with Kent—probably because she didn't care. And so Corona came gradually to be more and more a constant companion of the Kents, whether of father or daughter or of both, at their golf, at the gallops through the woods, on their evenings at home over cards or books; of their theater parties or concerts when the family was in New York.

It was not alone, almost not at all, Barbara's need of her that made Corona continue on that path, the end of which she soon foresaw for herself. Her impulse came from a sense of Kent's need of her, however much Kent was ignorant of that need, since he found his need fulfilled without search for the fulfillment. Her companionship with Kent gave her, too, a completer life, and in that she had her reward, until the constancy of such intimacy fanned her strong and responsive nature to passion.

Then it was that she ran away from it, and came to this retreat. Barbara's mention of another woman told Corona exactly what had happened. Her withdrawal from Kent had left unfulfilled that need which she had assuaged without his knowing it; and in his emptiness of life he had turned, unsuspecting, to another woman: a woman—so Corona could guess, and so Barbara had said—who had less of self-respect than Corona had. Why, she asked herself with reproaches, had she so eagerly put to Barbara that question about her

father's divorce? Was not that a betrayal of herself?

"Father divorced?" Barbara repeated. "Why, of course not. What gives you that idea, Corona? I tell you, he's in a beastly mess."

"Your mother's not with you?"

"No; she's in London, leading her own life, as she puts it." From the girl's mild irony, Corona had no difficulty in recognizing that as a pet and meaningless expression of Mrs. Kent's own creation to account for her vagaries. "And I pretty well guess," Barbara hurried on, "that he's soon going to be on the point of chasing to London, and begging mother for a divorce. And she'll refuse it, as you know and I know, merely because she doesn't need one and he does. And then—and then you know what'll go popping. Though, if she gave him his divorce, he'd be in just as bad a mess."

"Who—or what—is the woman?" Corona asked.

"A woman he met on the steamer. She's Sir Angus Beith's divorced wife, and he got out of it just as cheaply as he could."

"Impoverished?"

"No one really knows. But any Scotchman would have got out of it as cheaply as possible, and, besides that, if she's not impoverished, why father?"

"Ah, Barbara, you are a cynic," Corona told her.

"After all, does it matter? If she were even his kind—but she's not. With mother he's not exactly miserable; he's only starved. But with this—ugh, what can I call her?—he'd be utterly miserable."

"And is she in Rome now with you?"

"In Rome? Good heavens, Corona, I'm ashamed to look Bobby Forrest in the face. Every one's talking about it, of course. Poor, blind child that father is—or I suppose any man, for that matter, when they run across a woman like Eve Henley!"

"But, Barbara, what can I do about it? How can I help?"

"Come down to Rome. See father. Let him compare you two. Let him——"

"It's hardly a process of reasoning on his part, is it—of cold-blooded comparison?"

"Oh, I know it isn't," Barbara admitted with pretty impatience. "I don't really mean that. That was only my attempt to put it nicely. The point is, father has always been a little in love with you without knowing it. And, of course, you've never given him a chance to realize it. And now you're out of his reach, and he needed you, and, not having you, he's simply chucked himself headlong at the first woman who crossed his path. If only you'll come down to Rome, spend a week—two weeks, this other dear soul would be completely out of the running. I'll arrange it. Corona, do say you will."

"Barbara, you don't know what you're asking me to do," Corona said with a trace of sharpness.

"I do know. It's simple for you. I know exactly how it will work out for father. Give him a week of you and he'd be so utterly, so abysmally ashamed of himself for this other affair, that Henley blandishments would be aloe and wormwood."

"That may be," Corona said, with conviction enough, but without much enthusiasm.

"And you will come, won't you? When? Now, with me?"

"You do rush things so, dear. I must think it over."

"Think it over on the way back to Rome."

Corona laughed a little at the younger woman's impetuosity.

"If I started back to Rome with you, I should indeed be committed, shouldn't I?"

Barbara studied her with a sudden new interest. It was clear that she

sensed something unusual in Corona's reticence.

"But you've never before had to think things over," she said. "You've always known on the moment. That's why I've loved you so: you've always somehow known things surely, without thinking about them."

After that, Corona was silent for a moment, occupied with her own thoughts more than with what Barbara had said. Then she spoke, if in a tenser key than heretofore she had used:

"Yes, I'll go back to Rome with you," she said.

CHAPTER II.

During the course of that breath-taking ride into Rome—Barbara was determined to arrive in time for dinner—Corona managed to gather from the girl's luxuriating sarcasm—a fact now and then, much suggestion, many violent opinions, all delivered in Barbara's rollicking, emphatic manner—something of the woman Eve Henley was.

"I looked her up, Corona—had her looked up, rather. Hang it, I've got to confess it. It was father she was after, you know. I had Bobby Forrest look her up through the British embassy. She's a mess, unless I'm terribly biased. Where shall I start? Oh, I know you aren't interested, but I am. So, thanks, old dear, for listening.

"To start with, she's the daughter of an English clergyman. That's just the beginning; she's traveled high and wide since then. Private school, England; ran away; recovered; convent, France; ran away; lost; blank for a terribly long time. No one knows—not even her relatives, so the story goes. Imagine the blank, Corona. Then, suddenly, cast in a musical comedy in London. Minor part, chorus, something—I don't know. Yet I don't think it could have been the chorus. She's not that kind. There's a subtle something—class, perhaps—about her that would keep her

out of the chorus. You'll understand what I mean when you see her.

"Married Sir Angus Beith on a four-day acquaintance, the New Year's Eve after armistice, if that means anything to you. He divorced her—tiny allowance, of course, because it really was her fault, and a shilling a year would have been a gift to her. The correspondent was some Italian, I believe, or some equally fiery foreigner, who turned her down cold after the scandal. Then she wrote a novel—one of these sizzlers. Do I have to express myself any more plainly?

"That seemed to be enough to get her to America, and she tried the movies out in Hollywood. Oh, terribly genteel sort of way, of course, as one-time Lady Beith, or whatever. I forgot exactly what name she used, but you know the style of the thing. And now father, on her way home from failure in Hollywood! No chorus girl now; lady, oh, very perfect lady. Never permits you to know it too obviously, nor, on the other hand, ever to forget it. And a beauty, too. Oh, she's got the goods, all right, or she never could interest father. But she'll charge him too high for 'em. You get what I mean, don't you, Corona? Now aren't you glad you're coming down to Rome?"

Corona laughed in restrained protest.

"I don't quite know why I am coming at all," she said.

Instantly Barbara was regretful.

"I've told you too much in her favor. I've been too charitable with her. You're pitying her."

"No, no, not that. That's nothing to do with it. It's all really none of my affair."

"Oh, but isn't it? You know father. And you don't know her—yet. What's the feminine for soldier of fortune? That's Eve Henley, and no mean tactician, either."

"You've missed my point completely."

Barbara couldn't see it yet.

"I should think that any woman would be glad to save any man from Eve Henley," she said with a feigned pout of dissatisfaction. And then she broke into one of her infectious, bubbling laughs: "And so will you, Corona, when you see the situation."

Barbara's bland confidence, based on ignorance of the whole truth! If only she knew what lay behind Corona's growing distaste for having been rushed into the affair. Yet Corona suddenly realized that she was committed to nothing. A visit to Rome, a renewal of acquaintance with Kent, who would be surprised to see her, and with young Bobby Forrest, who would be amazed to know she had lived for nearly a year in his official jurisdiction—and what more than that?

Nothing more than that, on the surface of things. Nevertheless, she realized, with some apprehension of what it might mean to her, that her eagerness to see Walbridge Kent again was great, and growing greater as she approached him; and with it she felt a nameless, shadowy dread of meeting Eve Henley. Such women as she guessed Mrs. Henley to be, from Barbara's account of her, were not likely to be over-scrupulous in their methods; with her sort, it was far best to avoid crossing swords. But could she avoid it? Why, after all, had she come? Was it because, as she had first thought, she could not well say no to Barbara without qualifying that refusal with the explanation she could not well give? Or was it in reality because of an urge within her to ward off any prospective danger to Kent?

And yet a great sense of peace, amounting almost to that of renunciation, came upon her as, with the quick transition of twilight to darkness of the late summer evening, they entered the Eternal City by the Porta Pia. It was Rome, she told herself, with its spiritual tradition impregnated in the very air,

with its long legend of beauty and suffering and martyrdom and exaltation, that must always impose peace on those who entered its charmed mazes. Silently they sped past the Quirinal and on to the Piazza di Spagna. For her father, Barbara had explained in the midst of Corona's reveries, as usual, had forsworn hotels, and had taken an apartment in a certain storied palazzo just behind the Spanish embassy—at an outrageous price, of course, considering that it was a mere visit of passage, but that was Walbridge Kent for you.

The porter's lodge; the entrance to the apartment itself—massive oak, mosaics, the light of candles; servants in livery of mulberry and the darkest possible old gold; Kent himself, awaiting dinner in the library, perturbed about something as he waited, with that placidly baffled look on his strong face which Corona knew so well. She saw him, of course, before he saw her, for the entrance to the room was shrouded in darkness, whereas he stood under a shaded library lamp in the center of the great space. His figure, his carriage, always virile and imposing, seemed to her even younger than when she had last seen him. Was that of Eve Henley's doing?

"Barbara—at last!" he cried. "Is it really you? How you have frightened me!"

"But I haven't really frightened you," she laughed gayly, running across the intervening distance to him. "I've only made you remember that you have a daughter, by being away unexpectedly."

"Perhaps that's true," he smiled, greeting her with affection.

"And I've brought some one to dinner, and to stay—with me, while you are so busy elsewhere. You'll never know her. I wonder if you recall a woman who——" Barbara was tantalizing.

Then Kent caught sight of her.

"Corona!"

Corona offered him the cool clasp of her hand, rather reservedly.

"Barbara found me out, you see. Could any one ever refuse her anything? And so I came."

"I am very glad to see you."

How formal he was, Corona thought. She would match him.

"Are you here for long? Barbara, characteristically, has told me nothing."

"Perhaps. I don't really know," he said, looking furtive.

She saw that she was not really welcome; rather that he wanted to welcome her, but was, somehow, restrained.

"I shall be going back into the hills to-morrow. I'm not actually in Rome."

"Oh, but you must stay, now that you are here," he said, suddenly interested. "I think Barbara has done a brilliant day's work," he went on, growing more and more into his old intimacy. "I think I may need you very badly, Corona."

"Yes?" she queried, stifling her pleasure.

"Yes. Do you know, Corona, I have a clew—rather a sound clew—to the lost Giorgione. You remember, don't you"—and now he was all eagerness—"his 'Birth of Paris,' described by Anonimo as having been seen in the Budapest Gallery and stolen later? Do you remember? Von Kessel mentions it."

"Yes; I remember."

"And I should want your judgment on it. It is that which really brought me to Rome. A professional collector wrote me about it from Paris; he heard of it—a rumor through an impoverished son of a noble Italian family. We came through Naples. He came on from Paris and met me here this week. I am so glad you are here. Your judgment is intuitive, and far sounder than measuring rules and analyses. You will stay?"

His enthusiasm was for the Giorgione, not for her. But that was as it should be.

She laughed a little.

"Perhaps I am just in time. These professional collectors, you know! And there are so many lost Giorgiones. If he had painted twenty-four hours a day for a century he couldn't have done half of them."

"But the story of this one is so absolutely convincing, Corona," he said, subtly begging for her approbation of his credulity.

"It intrigues me—the story, at least. I shall be glad to hear it."

"I shall be glad to tell you at length about it. The story came to Lutgens through—"

"Who is Lutgens?" Corona asked.

"Lutgens? The French collector. At least, he's not really French, I suppose, but of Dutch forbears, or some such nationality. Perhaps you've heard of him?"

"No-o. I don't recall the name."

"Well, as for that, no more had I until we chanced to meet in the Anderson Galleries. But no matter. You'll meet him soon. He's coming to dinner. You're staying with us, of course. An informal dinner. Only Lutgens and— and Mrs. Henley." He looked a little guilty.

It was an awkward silence. Would he not explain Mrs. Henley? It was embarrassing for him. And Barbara, of course, said nothing.

"Is—Mrs. Henley—a collector as well?" Corona asked.

"Not a collector. Only vastly interested. She can't afford it." His defense of her was quick.

"I should very much like to stay," Corona said.

"Corona is staying with me, father. I've had her bags taken to my rooms. I shall sleep on the couch in my sitting room," Barbara said.

"Excellent," said Kent.

"And I think now we shall run along and dress. Dinner at eight, I suppose, as usual. We may be a little late,"

Barbara warned him as she caught Corona's arm to draw her away. "You can explain, can't you, father?" And when they had left the room, she whispered to Corona: "I simply had to get you away. He was so fussed, wasn't he? I felt awfully sorry for him."

"I feel awfully cheap, I must confess."

"You're doing beautifully. It's your duty—any woman's duty. Didn't you yourself notice how sheepish he is already?"

"It promises to be a difficult evening, I am afraid," returned Corona.

"But you'll like Lutgens."

"Yes?"

"Very much, I am sure." Barbara's voice took on a new quality, one hitherto strange to Corona. "Only don't like him too much."

To Corona's understanding the implication was clear. Though she sagaciously refrained from dwelling on the point, it had registered itself as something of importance enough to be watched. As, indeed, it later unmistakably appeared.

Corona rejected Barbara's offer of her maid, choosing to dress herself. She lingered thoughtfully over the task, finding a real concern for it newly imposed upon her. With an unbiased, even an impersonal appraisal, she found herself as lovely as when, ten years before, she had unwisely had an affair with Guido Maravene. How sharply the man recurred to her as she made the comparison; far more so, even, than when she had by chance run across him in Paris at the beginning of the year of seclusion, after all the lapse of time.

Since then there had been no marked changes in her appearance, save only that slight fullness of figure that maturity beneficently endowed her with. Her hair was as thick and as black and as lustrous as it had ever been; the deep blueness of her eyes still undimmed by living as she had forced herself to live.

There was youth in her carriage, in every expression of her face. The lines of fatigue she had begun to notice when she arrived in Italy had been erased by the benignant sun and soft breezes of Forlì. Had Walbridge Kent noticed these changes in her; or, noticing them, had they made any difference to him? Probably not. To him she was undoubtedly a mere being cast in feminine mold; as well in masculine mold for all he cared. He did respect her judgment; but was that worth anything to her?

She had brought but two evening gowns with her, and chose the oddly blue one. She would not be accused of overdressing. Queer that she had not worn it since that night in Paris when she met Maravene again at Paul Mezière's rather too bohemian supper. That man Maravene—how he did recur to her!

She was ready before Barbara, and waited over a cigarette.

"How lovely you are, Corona!" cried Barbara with all her exaggerated yet cordial enthusiasm. "Why have you never married? How have you been able to escape it? I'm sure I never saw you looking so lovely."

"Is marriage so difficult to escape?" Corona laughed, a little scornfully.

"From your point of view, I dare say."

They went into the library again. Eve Henley was there—blond and slight, in a coral dress—bending close to Kent on the farther side of the library table, over something of interest; and on the nearer side of the table, back to the door, stood a man, tall, very slender, with unusually sloping shoulders and long head carried square above them. The man was Guido Maravene; there were not two like him on earth. He was looking steadfastly, perhaps with a bit of disdain, at the piece of illuminated parchment which Kent was so keenly scrutinizing, and Mrs. Henley with him.

"I told you she was pretty," Barbara

whispered very softly, as she felt Corona draw back.

Corona was in the thrall of bafflement. Was it Maravene, or Lutgens? There were no introductions. Barbara addressed him as Lutgens, asked him to take Miss Strickland in to dinner. Behind the thick, thick lenses that were a part of him, Corona saw him wince at the sight of her; but so great was the man's control that no one noticed a moment's loss of it.

"Lutgens, you will find Miss Strickland a kindred spirit," Kent said, studying Corona with a visible trace of uneasiness.

"And far more interesting than that would suggest, I may prophesy," Maravene returned, looking at her as he would look at any pretty woman whom he had met for the first time.

It was clear to Corona that his preference was to permit his masquerade to stand without explanation. And she was in no position now to demand an explanation of it. Eve Henley, moreover, was talking with animation. Marvelously seductive voice the woman possessed.

"Are you really *the* Miss Strickland? How delightful! You know, since I saw what you did with the Meseroles' house at Wheatley Hills, I think I have wanted to meet no one more than you, Miss Strickland."

Corona made some reply—"You are very good," was what she thought she said, or something equally non-committal—and understood Eve Henley in a comprehensive glance. Slight but perfect figure for a woman of thirty, matchless complexion born of her English out-door life, eyes of cornflower blue, blond hair inclining almost to a peculiar red, coiffed by a true artist—perhaps even herself—to frame to its greatest effect the delicate, haunting piquancy of her face. A glorified creature, Barbara had called her; well, certainly very much glorified, at any rate.

"What do you think of this, Corona?" Kent was asking, as, holding the parchment still carefully, he moved round the table toward her. "Lutgens says he picked it up by chance, framed as a wall decoration in a peasant's cottage near Siena. He is inclined to think it is one of Filipepi's illuminations for the 1481 Dante."

In a glance she convinced herself of the excellence of the piece, whatever its identity.

"I am sure," she murmured, "that Monsieur Lutgens knows far more about it than I."

"How clever you are," said Eve Henley, beaming on her, and plainly affording to be generous.

The butler announced dinner. Kent and Mrs. Henley led the way. Barbara went with them. Corona drew back for a second, and Lutgens willingly followed her lead. He wanted an understanding as much as she.

"Will you explain to me at once——" Corona began in a whisper.

"Sometime. Not now," he said curtly, hating her with his eyes behind those inscrutable lenses he had to wear.

"But I shan't permit my friends——"

"We have both something to hide. Let us keep it hidden," he said with plain threat.

Barbara called from the door, rather eagerly:

"Aren't you two coming?"

Thus Corona went in to dinner.

CHAPTER III.

For a time the dinner was uncomfortable. Barbara was too obviously awaiting the opening of something. Maravene was not sure of his ground. Kent was trying to keep his eyes away from Mrs. Henley who, of all of them, was very sure of herself. Corona met her persiflage with a calm equanimity. When the *antipasto* was removed Kent suggested suddenly:

"Lutgens, will you tell Miss Strickland the story of the Giorgione?"

"I doubt if she would care to hear it," Maravene said, looking at her with unspoken query.

"On the contrary, I should very much like to hear it," Corona said, with whatever of irony; and realized that Kent had made the suggestion that he might be left freer to talk with Mrs. Henley.

"Has Mr. Kent told you nothing of it?" Maravene asked.

"Nothing more than that there is a rumor, a story, or whatever." If only she could see clearly through those thick lenses!

"I make no point of vouching for the authenticity of it," Maravene began. "I have passed the story on to Mr. Kent exactly as I got it. It seems to have intrigued him enough to make the trip over."

"I am listening," said Corona.

Across the table, Eve Henley was engaging Kent in most intimate conversation. Now and again, as he listened, he glanced across at Corona, but did not want to meet her eyes. Barbara, with a shrewdness beyond her years, was finding keen enjoyment in the situation. Maravene talked on, in those smooth, well-balanced periods that made his speech so attractive.

"I chanced to meet in Paris," he said, in a low-pitched tone to Corona, "a broken-down scion of old Italian nobility—one of the Forli. Do you chance to have heard of the family? An old ducal family, I believe, with a patent going back to Barbarossa."

Forli! The duchess' son! How much should she admit?

"Yes, Monsieur—Lutgens, I have heard the name, I believe."

"It is an old, old family. I checked up on it in the Almanach de Gotha," Lutgens said, in a tone that invited her to do the same, if she doubted him. "This chap Forli told me, quite simply, that one of his ancestors bought it from

a Bohemian and, not daring to reveal stolen property in the castle, had it hidden in a crypt in the little church on the estate—San Paolo Agnesino, I believe he called it."

How many times Corona had worshipped in the quaint little church!

"And the son—this Forli?" she queried.

"He is at present attached in some minor capacity to the embassy in Paris, and cannot get away just yet. We are waiting now only for him to come."

Corona found Maravene almost intensely honest about it all, as if he were defying her to prove his deception. But then, had he not always been? Was that ability of his not the least of his convincings?

Corona suddenly found Barbara staring at them both.

"I had never heard the story before," she said. "When is father going to—Forli? And is not that the name of the place where you have been living?"

"The very same family, I think, Barbara," Corona said calmly.

Maravene was amazed now.

"You—been staying there? Unbelievable coincidence! Incredible!"

"Merely fortuitous. It means nothing. They may not be the same family, even. There are so many branches of these Italian families."

Corona felt a sharp sense of guilt under Barbara's questioning eyes. And, though she knew that this way out of the impasse was only temporizing, nevertheless she knew no other.

"Tell me something about Giorgione," Barbara asked Maravene. Whereupon Maravene, almost with relief, Corona thought, turned away from her and gave his attention exclusively to Barbara.

His voice changed now, and his manner. Instead of being rather defiantly on his guard as he had been with Corona, he became the fascinating man of the world, striving instinctively with every means at his command to interest

Barbara, to make himself for the moment her chief interest in life. Maravene was an enigma to her, and would always be. To her who saw most men so clearly, he presented puzzlement. He gave one the impression of being so sincere, so candid, so genuine. Was he dishonest and deceptive of studied purpose, or had he the innate knack of actually making of himself whatever he saw the need of being for the moment? Corona, in the earlier days, had had a theory about that, but the theory had failed and she had paid for its failure. Even now she felt somehow sorry for the man.

Barbara felt an easy victim to his fascination, if only temporarily. To the brilliancy of his conversation she listened, with all the sophistication of a worldly-wise woman, with banter, with cynicism, with witty retort and sympathetic approbation. But underneath this froth Corona saw in her an undercurrent of deep interest. She recalled that chance speech of Barbara's before dinner, expressing the hope that Corona might not like Lutgens too much. What if Barbara—

Kent suddenly realized that Corona had for a long time been left to her own devices, and rather shamefacedly drew her into his own conversation with Eve Henley. Corona did not enter into it with any zest. Deliberately she overlooked Mrs. Henley's subtle challenges and kept herself aloof from any show of intimacy with Kent, as if she acknowledged Mrs. Henley as her superior. This attitude more and more drew Kent's wondering attention to herself, she realized. But that was not the chief aim of her tactics. For the present she was far more interested in keeping an eager ear attuned to what took place between Barbara and Maravene.

She was glad when the dinner was over; glad again when the strained, rather desultory chatter over coffee and liqueurs on the balcony was done. Mrs.

Henley put an end to that by reminding Kent that she was due to appear sometime during the evening at the Sammarco palace for one of the *conte's* silly affairs, to be sure, but one scarcely to be avoided, since the embassy had been good enough—and so forth. She asked Kent to drop her there. Kent had to comply, and Corona relished the man's uneasy look at herself as he gave his consent. Barbara, in duty bound, went along to see Mrs. Henley off, and Corona was left alone on the balcony for a moment with Maravene. She lost no time in taking advantage of the situation.

"Perhaps you'll explain yourself," she began immediately. "These people are my best friends, you know. However you came to be involved with them, I can't guess. But—the woman always pays." She was very bitter, and took no pains to conceal it.

In the darkness he moved over closer to her, and, in moving, dislodged a chair.

"The deuce!" he muttered. "That'll fetch Miss Kent out to us immediately."

"Well, why not?"

"I wanted some time with you, Corona. You've never understood me, and never tried to. I think I've always loved you—until this evening, oddly enough."

"Perhaps I don't understand you, but I intend to look out for my friends."

"Don't drive me to desperate straits."

"Desperate straits meaning—"

"You have yourself to look out for," he reminded her with no subtle threat. "It would be difficult to make these people understand—certain things."

"As if that mattered to me, provided affairs come to a crisis!"

"It matters more than you know. Besides, you have no right to judge me too harshly. It is a matter of the utmost importance to me that Kent retains his good opinion of me."

"I dare say."

"And my intentions are absolutely honorable."

"Then why the change of name?"

"I am Lutgens—my real name," he said defiantly. "Maravene was boyish nonsense. I told you I had broken with my parents."

"Have you ever told me a thing I could believe?"

"Perhaps not—except that I loved you."

Again that pity for the man surged over her, almost softened her toward him.

"Then you must go very circum-spectly. I shall watch."

"I should like a chance of explaining to you. I daren't attempt it here. Miss Kent will be back any moment. Can you not come to see me? I am staying at a little hotel in the Corso—the Brittanique."

"I can't do that."

"Then I shall write you about it—here. You are here for some time, are you not?"

"Probably until the *hegira* to Forli," she returned with mild sarcasm.

Maravene caught his breath in a way she remembered he had always done when in the excitement of difficulty.

"And again that—amazing coincidence. Corona, I beg of you to say nothing to the duchess about this picture. I know nothing about it except what her son told me."

"And that again depends on many things. Your request, you can imagine, does not tend to endow you with any halo of good faith."

"But I can explain——"

"You have always done that. I am sorry, Guido, but—did I not have my lesson?"

"You were always too good to me. I have tried—I did try——"

Corona heard footsteps through the library within.

"Let us say no more of it," she warned him.

Before he could speak, Barbara appeared in the soft flare of light from the library through the French window to the darkened balcony. She stopped there for a moment, accustoming her eyes to the night. Corona turned to look at her at such an advantage. Her habitual air of excessive animation had been stilled; her restiveness, even in her present pose, was quiescent; her rather pale face was flushed. Corona was sure that she saw a flash of quick pain in the wide-set brown eyes. At what, Corona asked herself? And then remembered that, after she went, Guido had changed his seat to one nearer to herself.

"Am I intruding?" Barbara asked; and that was never her natural voice.

"As if such a thing were possible, Barbara!"

Guido stood up and proffered his chair, taking for himself the one he had originally occupied. The three sat in a stiffish interchange of guarded, awkward commonplaces until Guido took his departure.

Then Barbara asked:

"Have you known Monsieur Lutgens before?"

Corona hesitated a moment, for there was more than mere idle curiosity in the question.

"Yes, dear," she said.

"For a long time?"

"Rather long. Not much recently, however."

"What do you think of him?"

"Why do you ask?"

This time Barbara hesitated before replying.

"For no particular reason," she said; and there was a quality in her voice that, for the first time in their acquaintance, shut Corona out from her. Corona knew instinctively an apprehension so violent as to be manifested in a physical tremor.

"Barbara, if there is anything you want to tell me——"

"There isn't, thanks," she said, and rose abruptly. "I am suddenly very tired from my drive. I think I shall go to bed early. You don't mind, do you?" All in that unusual tone that so completely walled Corona out. And Barbara went through into the library without more words.

CHAPTER IV.

Corona sat long on the balcony after Barbara left, her ears hearing the night sounds of the city, her eyes seeing the dark purple and red gold where the night met the city; though, in reality, she was far removed from it. She felt as if she had been lifted far above the world, and there endowed with an exceeding clarity of vision that enabled her to see and analyze, not her own part alone, but that of the others, in this confusion of purposes into the midst of which she had been suddenly plunged.

Barbara was in love with Guido Maravene. What would Barbara in love be like? Was Guido Maravene worthy the girl? Who could answer that question, for what might the right woman not do for Maravene? The Henley woman, too—no doubt there; Kent needed only to be made to see. She herself could give him the clarity he needed. But what of herself? What of the cost to herself? What should she do about Guido Maravene and Barbara? Permit it to continue? How to stop it? Yet all those questions were answered for her as with some universality of vision as she sat alone, in the night. She loved Kent as always she had, and always must; and loving him enabled her to see clearly both for him and for Barbara, who, since the defection of his wife, was dearer to him than himself. And that which stood out clearest of all was that she must watch herself, and not reckon costs.

Kent returned toward midnight, and Corona was still on the balcony. He

came straight out through the library, in light coat and hat as he must have left his car, obviously intending to sit for a time on the balcony with his own thoughts, and with greater obviousness not expecting to find any one there.

"Corona, you here?"

"Yes."

"But—Barbara?"

"Asleep—I hope." Why, she asked herself, did she add those last words?

"I stayed here. It is so lovely."

"May I sit? Do you mind? Am I intruding?"

"Of course not."

"Let me get you a cloak. It is chilly."

"You'll disturb Barbara. I shan't need one. I shall be going in soon."

"Take mine. Let me throw this about you. Don't go in yet."

Before she could stop him, he had withdrawn his own coat and thrown it, still freshly redolent of tobacco and—yes, however faintly—of subtle, feminine perfume, about her shoulders.

"Is it too rough, too harsh, Corona? I could get you——"

"No. I like it, I think."

"Yes; you must have been chilly. These summer nights in Rome are—are deceptive."

He sat down, in the chair Maravene had occupied, and lighted a cigarette.

"Corona, I am very glad you are here," he said rather explosively. "You make things somehow different."

"Barbara insisted on my coming."

"Yes; she would be lonely. What do you think of Mrs. Henley?"

"I scarcely know her. Very pretty, vivacious—what do you want me to say?"

"I—I feel that an explanation is due you. I can't think why I feel it, but I do. You'll no doubt be wondering about—many things."

"I rarely wonder about things."

"No, you don't; that's true. Yet I want to explain; I have to explain to you."

"As you like."

"I don't like to have you think things about Mrs. Henley. I am getting a divorce——"

"A divorce?" Corona's query was sharp, unconscious.

"Yes! Do you think it so terrible?" He was most eager for her good opinion.

"No, but—Barbara didn't tell me."

"I haven't yet told her. I didn't want her to know until it was a fait accompli. She—might not like it, and, if she didn't—well, I should feel very hurt. Barbara, to me, is—— Well, you know, Corona, what Barbara is to me."

"Yes, I know. She is more to you than even you realize."

"I think that myself, sometimes. Yet she does not fill all my needs. Lately I've realized that. And so—my wife came over from London to meet me in Paris, and we discussed it, and she accepted my offer of a settlement. The machinery is in motion; I believe it takes about three weeks longer."

It fell finally to Corona to break the silence that was becoming irksome to both of them.

"Does Mrs. Henley know?" Instantly she regretted the question.

"Yes, of course she knows, or she would not be seen with me so intimately. Do you approve, Corona?"

A long time Corona thought.

"Can you understand yourself clearly? Are you divorcing your wife in order to divorce her, or to marry again?"

Kent, with all his mental power, couldn't see what she meant.

"It comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

For an instant Corona made no reply. She was suddenly seething with intolerance of the situation.

"Oh, you are blind!" she cried.

That disconcerted him.

"Blind?" He looked at her with inquiry.

She drew his coat closer about herself.

"Yes, blind."

"I wonder if I am. I wonder if I'm not. You've always made me think so clearly." Strange statement to come from a man of his type!

"Think now, then," she cried, her intolerance enduring.

And his reply was not what might have been expected.

"I try to think. When I am away from her I can think clearly—or almost; clearly enough to—wonder. But when I am with her I can't think. She gets into my blood, like a—virus. No, no, anything but that! She is anything but that. And yet she is, you know yourself, the sort of woman who—— She is in my blood."

Corona shivered slightly, and rose.

"It is chilly. I think I shall go in."

He too arose, and seemed to bar the window against her egress.

"Can't you stay, and help me settle this matter?" he pleaded with her. "You've started me to thinking clearly, and, if you go, my mental vision will be clouded again. Corona, please stay, and talk to me; or let me sit with you and think."

"And, if I sit with you and talk, and let you think with me, and to-morrow you go to her—— Oh, no! Of what use would it be?"

"I'm suddenly afraid without you, Corona. You keep my mind as it should be. And when you go, I am sure——" He was like a boy, confessing, pleading.

She stood tense for a moment, pitying him. Her intolerance left her, and in its place came resolution. She put her hand on his arm, and in a voice that should have told him much, she said:

"Walbridge, when you go to Forli, take Barbara only. Barbara and me, I know the old *duchessa*. You will like her, the *duchessa*. She can help you more than I can help. Promise? You

and I and Barbara—just the three of us?"

"You seem suddenly to be begging me," he said, in perplexity at her change of mood.

"Perhaps I am. Does it matter?"

On the moment he was a different man—self-assertive, masterful, almost.

"Yes, it does matter, all at once. I don't know why. All at once it's tremendously important to me. Stay with me! I do want to talk this over with you."

Her eyes closed against his, and she shook off the hand which he, in turn, had laid upon her arm.

"No, I am going in. Good night."

"And you leave me here alone, now, on the balcony, to stay and think?"

"You are coming to Forli with me. Good night."

Unfair advantage or not, it was hers, now, she thought as she left him there. She exulted that she had dared take it as it was offered to her. Why should she not take it? All her life, it seemed to her, had been directed to this end, to this very crisis. What did it not mean to her that Kent should take the course she had offered him: Barbara safe away from Maravene, to check at its root the infatuation she was beginning to feel for the man; Kent with herself at Forli, in the peace and seclusion they both loved, in the golden days and silver nights that came to no place on earth as to her laurel-shaded terrace set high above olive orchards and vineyards.

But even as she dreamed of this in exalted reverie, the affair of the lost Giorgione came to her mind. How to keep Maravene away, after all? Maravene would come to them there, if only for the painting. A bridge not yet to be crossed, and a very short bridge, at that. Given Barbara and Kent present at Forli as her guests, without either Eve Henley or Maravene, and she could pretty well manage the rest.

But such facility of success was not to be hers.

Rather early the next morning a messenger brought her a letter from Maravene; it was relayed to her, since she was not yet dressed, through the servants and Barbara, who handed it to her. It was in a plain envelope, but the handwriting was unmistakably Guido's. Corona read it hastily:

It really is most important to both of us that I see you for a short talk before you tell the Kents anything about me. I must explain in person. It means everything to me, and I imagine how much it means to you.

I can't, of course, ask you to come to the hotel here; but I should be very grateful if you would meet me at any time or place of your own choosing, preferably this morning. Can you not lunch with me at some place not likely to be frequented by any of your friends—say Tomaselli's in the Via San Gregorio?

I await your answer with impatience.

Guido.

Not until she had finished the brief note did Corona realize that Barbara still stood by, almost staring at her. Instinctively she made a move toward concealing the letter, for she saw written in the girl's eyes the plain intelligence that she had recognized the handwriting, and regarded with smoldering hostility the fact that Corona had received the letter.

The older woman caught her breath again with that intuitive fear of what the signs pointed to between Barbara and Maravene.

"Oh, are you waiting for the answer?" she asked.

"Is there to be an answer?" Barbara asked as a stranger would have asked.

"I'm not yet sure. Let me think. Yes, I shall write a line. Is the messenger still waiting?"

"I believe so."

At the desk in the sitting room, Corona wrote a brief reply:

It is not at all important to either of us that I see you again. I prefer not to. To

set your mind at ease, I may tell you that you are still Lutgens, and honorable, for all that I have told the Kents to the contrary.

Let there be no mistake about this, however: you are to leave Barbara Kent strictly and severely alone. In this respect, it is war between you and me—war to the finish.

CORONA STRICKLAND.

Corona hesitated a moment before she signed and sealed it. She was right about it. She had no mind to entangle her name with Maravene's by a public appearance alone with him. Let him understand once for all what to expect.

She delivered the note to Barbara, who took it away without a word. Barbara's strangeness toward her, her aloofness, Corona suddenly found intolerable, and resolved to eradicate it.

"Come back to me, Barbara, when you have delivered the note," she requested. "I want to talk with you about your father. How is he this morning?"

"He is riding with Mrs. Henley."

Corona wasted no time in being surprised about that; it was no more than she had expected.

"I have something important to talk with you about, Barbara," she said. "It must be done now, very soon. You brought me down here, you know. I am relying now on your help."

"Thanks, very much, Corona." Still she stood there silent for a moment, and then broke out with: "Oh, I am hateful, I know. You don't understand, you can't understand how I feel. Why don't you tell me about Monsieur Lutgens? I heard more than you know, last night. I must know. It's all so queer. What is there between you and him? You have known him before. It's not like you to conceal things. There must be something—I think he loves you, or has, or might."

Corona thought quickly, and replied with no more than:

"We have known one another since we studied art together in Paris. I met him again about a year ago. As to his

loving me, I can assure you that it would make no difference to me. Run along now and deliver the note, and come back to me."

Thus, before Kent came back from his ride with Mrs. Henley, Corona had succeeded tactfully in two important missions: by calling on Barbara to use her influence to take Kent to Forlì, she had succeeded in getting Barbara away from Rome, and that meant away from Maravene for the present.

CHAPTER V.

Eve Henley's morning ride with Kent was not as satisfactory as it might have been, nor as she expected it would be.

Her social senses had been so sharpened by experience in the past, and by necessity in the present, that she had no difficulty in recognizing Corona as her enemy, however little she knew about the woman. At dinner with Kent the night before, she had felt Kent's unusual restraint, had felt some unusual bond of sympathy between him and Miss Strickland, without in the least surmising what it amounted to. She had imputed his restraint on that occasion to Corona's presence alone, quite as if Corona had been any other woman. But that restraint of his endured, oddly enough, to a noticeable degree through the morning ride. Kent's guard was still up against herself, even though Miss Strickland was not there. To Eve Henley, that fact was food for immediate thought and summary action.

What was there in the past between Corona and Kent, she asked herself? How to find that out? She knew no one in Rome who knew Corona. Kent she could not ask. Barbara she knew instinctively was her enemy. Where should she find out what she had to know?

Lutgens, the collector!

Lutgens, she assumed, knew more about Kent than she herself did. More-

over, like Barbara, her keen woman's senses had told her of something unusual between the two as a result of their meeting in Kent's library while they awaited dinner. Lutgens might know something—more at least than she did—and respond to tactful questioning. She did not know him, to be sure, save that brief meeting with him at dinner; but it was simple enough to find a pretext for going to a collector, and she got his address from Kent before she left him.

Maravene, or Lutgens, was still stinging under the rebuff which Corona's letter had given him, when Mrs. Henley was announced to him. Surprised and curious, Maravene went down to the stuffy private sitting room of the second-rate hotel, and waited for him.

Maravene, having seen her only in her dinner gown, and having then paid not too much attention to her, scarcely recognized her in her smart, dark tailor suit. She saw his hesitation, and introduced herself.

"As if I could have forgotten you!" Maravene returned, studying her, with all his keen perception of womankind, through the almost imperceptible barricade of his thick lenses.

"I came to you"—she broached her errand, a little hesitantly, perhaps even a little shyly—"because I thought you might suggest— You see, I want to make a little present to a very dear friend of mine—Mr. Kent, so—so please don't tell him. I thought you might have something, some curio, some work of art. I can't afford anything so very expensive."

Maravene wondered. He knew something about her—just a little of her history, a little from his perception of the affair with Kent. His wide experience of women supplied any essential deficiency of that knowledge—at least, little by little it did, as he listened to her.

"I have no doubt but that I could manage something," he said.

"But it must be authentic. I am no good judge."

"I could assure you of its authenticity."

"I believe that. Miss Strickland seems to have—how to put it?—respect for you."

"Miss Strickland?" he queried, in genuine surprise that Corona's name should be brought into the affair.

"Yes. I gathered from last night that she knows you rather well. Am I not right?" She looked rather too directly for the answer.

Why, Maravene wondered, was she asking particularly about Corona? So swiftly had she led the way to the subject that he was inclined to believe that it was the reason for her coming. And again why? Simple. A discovery invaluable, that Eve Henley was afraid of Corona.

"I have known Miss Strickland," said he matter-of-factly, "since we studied art in Paris some ten years ago."

"Oh? Really? And intimately?"

"Quite."

"Tell me more about it. I am immensely interested in her, and her work."

Maravene laughed in remonstrance.

"Would you expect me to tell what is really her affair?"

"Was it so serious as that?" she laughed in turn, with an air of not taking it with any grave consideration.

Maravene studied her for a moment.

"Mrs. Henley," said he at length, "let us not fence any more."

"Fence?"

"Yes, fence. You and I are both in fear of Miss Strickland. You for your own reasons, I for mine."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You for your reasons, I for mine," Maravene repeated, as if he had not heard her. "I shall tell you my reasons. You know about the Giorgione?"

"Yes."

"Miss Strickland, I may tell you

frankly, so much influences Kent that he will rely pretty closely on her judgment in the matter. Equally frankly, I will tell you that I do not know whether it is a genuine Giorgione or not. I have never seen it. But I must sell it to Kent."

"Would she know?"

"No more than I, in reality. But she can—I am frank with you—completely destroy Kent's confidence in me with a word, if she wants to; and, moreover, if she says that it is not a Giorgione, Kent will believe her—so long as she has this influence over him."

"Why do you tell me all this?"

"Because your success and mine lie in the selfsame path."

"And what is that?"

"To destroy Kent's faith in her—kill it utterly."

"That's not so easy."

"Easier than you think, according to a plan I have. But I shall need your help."

"My help? Whatever are you suggesting?"

"Your help, but in a way that cannot harm you with Kent. I can assure you of that. May I rely on you?"

"I must know first what it entails."

"That depends on the coöperation of the young Duke of Forli, who is managing the Forli end of the affair."

"Well? What about him?"

"I have just wired him to hurry on from Paris at the earliest opportunity. I must consult with him before I could consider myself at liberty to confide even in you. He should be here tomorrow afternoon. You may believe that I wish to push the affair as much as I can. May I rely on you?"

"That depends, candidly, on what it is you want me to do."

"I shall tell you that as soon as I have talked with young Forli. May I come then and see you?"

"Yes. It can do me no harm to listen, at any rate."

"Thanks! About the little trinket, the curio, the gift to your friend——"

She saw that he was laughing at her, and saved herself:

"I must give you credit for being cleverer than I, and I have never before flattered a man to that extent."

"I appreciate it in full measure," Maravene said, as he bowed her out.

CHAPTER VI.

It was no difficult matter to get Kent to go to Forli. Corona guessed that correctly in advance. The mere fact that her year's residence at the castle would give her access to the reputed Giorgione for careful study, away from the influence of Maravene, was in itself a compelling argument with him. Corona, however, took no part in the persuasion. She left all that to Barbara, in order that the girl might believe herself to be the essential moving spirit of the visit, and for that reason the more willingly go herself.

So well did Barbara present the case, that by four o'clock that afternoon the three of them in a hired car had left the Porta Pia behind, and were speeding across the Campagna to that far line of blue haze that marked the Abruzzi. Corona had wired the duchess, with the result that dinner was awaiting them when, at twilight, they had made the last turn of the white, sinuous road leading up from the plains, and were safe from the world in the castle's impregnable courtyard.

The matter of the reputed Giorgione Corona had considered well, and had put the case in this manner to Kent on the way up:

"I should hate very much—and so will you, Walbridge, when you know her—to hurt the duchess in any slightest degree. It appears that no one knows about this picture save the young duke, and I may as well tell you that his reputation is none too good. He has

many, many times done cruel injury to his mother, and I should not like to have it happen again. If, by any chance, she got the notion that he was trying to dupe you, who are her friends since you are mine—if she should get that notion, and if there were any foundation to it, I am sure that it would be pretty well a mortal blow to his mother."

"I can imagine that," said Kent, "from what you have told me of the duchess."

"And for that reason, I would suggest that we tell her nothing of the real purpose of our visit to Forlì. I suggest that you be considered only as guests of mine. To-morrow, you and I can go down to the little church—I know the *padre curato* there—and make quiet search. I am sure that Padre Giacomo will permit me anything, and maintain the strictest confidence for the duchess' sake. If we find the crypt and the picture, we can settle the matter for ourselves and be ready for—Monsieur Lutgens and young Forlì when they arrive. The duchess need never know about it unless we find that the painting appears to be genuine."

Kent found no objection, and so the matter stood. The four of them passed a delightful evening, and walked together on the terrace until the mountain chill drove the duchess within.

Very early next morning, Corona and Kent set off on foot down the half mile of shining road to the village, and the church of San Paolo Agnesino. The little church had just been emptied of its early worshippers. The sacristan, bent and gnarled and somehow malevolent looking in his stubby beard and shabby cassock, was swinging shut the great doors, and recognized Corona with a deep obeisance, at the same time opening the door again for her.

"We came to see the *padre curato*," Corona told him, as she passed into the dim stillness of the nave.

Kent stopped at the door with bared head, and watched her as she followed the sacristan, but at a slower step. The old man beckoned for her to stop where she was, while he went on into the apse to announce the callers to the curate. The spot where she stopped chanced to be exactly where the light filtered softly through a marvelously colored window, as if to give her an aura of radiance. Seeing that Kent did not at once obey her summons to him, she came back toward him a few steps. They met halfway to the door.

"Santa Madonna," Kent whispered, as if to himself as they met.

Corona did not hear him, and asked him what he had said.

Kent spoke in an unusual tone.

"I suddenly realize, Corona, that I have never known you before—perhaps never seen you before as you really are."

"I don't understand what you mean," she returned, and with sincerity.

He was looking over her shoulder past her.

"Never mind, now. They are coming to us—the curate, is it not?"

Corona turned to see the Padre Giacomo approaching them from his offices behind the altar, a man rather tall and spare, from beneath whose three-cornered black cap a fringe of white hair framed a gentle and studious face. He smiled at Corona, as he came near enough to recognize her, a smile of a peculiar reverence, it seemed, and removed his cap with a simple courtesy of unusual charm.

"I have brought you a friend from America, Signor Curato," Corona introduced Kent. "You will find that he is interested in the selfsame things that interest you."

The curate gave Kent a delicate, blue-lined hand, and read Kent's face with beneficent scrutiny.

"I am very grateful to her excellency for bringing you to me," he said.

Kent made fitting reply.

Corona permitted no further delusion concerning the concrete object of their call.

"We have heard, Signor Curato, that there is in one of the crypts of the church, a painting, an oil painting, representing the birth of Paris."

"Ah!" breathed the curate with some surprise; "the Giorgione?"

"It is here, then?" exclaimed Kent.

The curate shook his head in gentle denial.

"No, no, excellency. I merely identified the subject with the artist. Every Italian knows of the lost Giorgione, I think."

"But would you know if it were here?" Corona asked.

"Emphatically, yes. There is nothing in the crypts that I do not know. If there were an oil painting there, I would have taken it out long ago, so that the dampness would not rot the canvas, and would have sent it to the castle. Your excellencies have been misinformed. It must be one of those thousand rumors concerning Giorgione, no one of which has ever been substantiated."

"And you have heard none connected with the family of Forli?" Corona asked the curate.

"None; not ever, signorina."

Kent and Corona looked at one another; the curate in silence watched their exchange of glances, thoroughly comprehending them. He waited for them to speak, and Kent broke the silence.

"Are you sure that you know the crypts, all the secret places?"

"As I know my hand. I will gladly guide your excellency through the church and show everything there is."

Kent put the silent question to Corona who, now thoroughly convinced of at least an attempt at fraud, whether by Maravene or by young Forli, chose to dismiss the affair once for all.

"I think it is not necessary, thanks,

Signor Curato. That is, Walbridge, unless you have some special curiosity. The *padre curato* would really know if there were a painting in the church."

"It would be a pleasure to show Signor Kent——" the curate began.

"Sometime, perhaps, before I leave Forli. This morning, I think not. We have already taken enough of your time. Shall we not go?"

After they were well away from the church, crossing the piazza to the censorious confusion of a bevy of fat, lazy sparrows which basked in the brilliant white sun, Kent spoke:

"Whatever do you think of it all, Corona?"

"I am very glad we have told the duchess nothing about it," was her sole reply.

"But I can't yet believe that the curate knows. I must write Monsieur Lutgens at once concerning it."

Corona could not well remonstrate. They walked slowly back up the white, hard road to the castle, in a silence which they broke but rarely. The postman overtook them and, recognizing Corona, gave her some letters for the duchess, which he was about to deliver, and two others concerning which he asked:

"Are these people now at the castle?"

One of the letters was for Kent—probably from Eve Henley, if one could judge by the apparent femininity of the handwriting. The other was for Barbara, unmistakably again in Maravene's handwriting.

She gave Kent his letter, and saw a faint flush pass over his face as he pushed it hastily into his coat pocket. She retained Barbara's letter herself; and Kent, of course, made no inquiry concerning it. It was to be expected that Kent would have given his address to Mrs. Henley, but that Barbara should have taken the trouble to give hers to Maravene, since they were to be away so short a time, was not reassuring.

And when she gave the letter to Barbara, although she tried to act as if she considered it a commonplace affair, nevertheless she was aware that Barbara directly challenged her opinion, in a glance almost defied her to comment upon the letter. Corona, of course, was too sagacious. Barbara's high spirit would rebel against any comment; more than likely would even prevent her from believing anything that Corona might tell her about Maravene.

For the rest of the day, the girl stayed mostly to herself. The duchess, from the beginning of Corona's tenancy, had set up a rule that she was not to seek her guest save when she called for her. Hence Corona was left alone with Kent for the afternoon; and again, after the four of them had gathered for late dinner, she found herself with him for the evening. By tacit consent they went out again upon the terrace, and walked back and forth among the laurels, aimlessly, saying nothing but commonplaces, every word of which seemed, in that mellow night far removed from all contact with the world, to be of transcendent importance.

"You did better than you know to bring me here," Kent said after half an hour of such slow walking.

"The curate may not know all there is to be known about the Giorgione."

"It isn't that I am thinking of. I am thinking of my life, trying to discover a moment in the past years that you have not been an essential part of it without my having realized it."

"If I have been of any use to you—but why think of it? It is going on presently as it has been going on for these past years. My vacation will soon be over, and then I am coming back to—"

"Not as it has been these past years, Corona. It has all been suddenly changed for me. That night on my balcony in Rome, this morning seeing you in the little church down there—"

"The influence of surroundings, of traditions——"

"Oh, never that; or never that alone. It may be that influence has made me see clearly. But I do see clearly now. I've loved you for years, but the barrier you've put up——"

"The barrier I've put up? Oh!"

"No longer exists, Rome, and these solitary heights, has removed the barrier."

Corona moved a little away from him, lest he feel the ecstasy that pervaded her being; so overpowering it seemed to her, that he must feel it, and know it. It was not for this she had brought him to Forlì; it was only to make him think clearly. She wanted to talk, to divert his mind, to say anything, but she dared not trust her voice. She felt tears gathering in her eyes, and with a quick gesture dashed them away.

Kent felt her withdrawal, and covered the ground she had put between them. He caught her hand, moist with the tear she had dashed from her eyes. His voice was changed now, tense and low, but dominant to a degree she had never heard in him.

"Corona, I know all things now. This must last forever—this—you and I. It was for this I was born, and have lived. you know it; you, who know all things, know it as well as I. Come to me. Why, why draw back from me, when you know? Come!"

She dared not surrender to him, lest her control, lest her very life be given to him in that instant that she gave him her love. He caught her hand, and pressed it to his lips. It frightened her a little, the touch of his lips, frightened her of herself, for now she knew more than ever the tremendous force of the passion she had for him. Reluctantly, yet by will, she withdrew her hand from his; and, even as she withdrew it, he caught her in his arms.

"Corona, my beloved."

She struggled against his embrace,

through fear always; not fear of him but for herself, lest giving him her so great love, her very life must at the same moment be given to him. She broke from his arms, and stood gazing at him for a moment through the almost impenetrable darkness.

Then suddenly she sprang toward him again, her arms outstretched to him, her face transfigured with the force of her passion. She seemed to draw herself to his height, and her arms closed about his neck.

"You—you say you love me?" she whispered.

"All my life, I think."

"Pitiable man, you don't know what love is. It is this—and this—and this—through life forever, and through eternity."

CHAPTER VII.

Corona slept unusually late the next morning, and awoke to two surprises. The first was borne in upon her through her open window that gave on the terrace—unmistakably the voice of Maravene, floating in to her on the gentle breeze from the sea. He was talking with Kent. The distance was too great for her to distinguish what they said. Through the window she discovered that the two of them were alone, walking up and down in the winding path between the ilex trees. Eager to solve the inexplicable mystery of Maravene's abrupt appearance here, she dressed hastily and started out to the terrace. She called at Barbara's rooms for her. A maid met her at the door, and informed her that the signorina had left for Rome very early in the morning, and that her father would explain.

The memory of the night before was all too plainly in Kent's eyes as he greeted her. Maravene was debonaire and self-confident, almost jaunty in his urbanity toward her—the boyish Maravene she had known, whose tailor and barber permitted no sign of years to

show upon him. Kent's reserve was a cloak of pleasing contrast, concealing a character no less young in essence. She owned herself amazed at Maravene's audacity in coming here, after the warning she had sent him, and her eyes plainly told him so.

"You scarcely expected us so soon, did you, Miss Strickland?" Maravene said with his disarming, attractive smile.

"No, I must admit."

Kent explained:

"It appears that the picture is in the little church, after all, Corona. The young duke of Forli arrived in Rome last night, and Monsieur Lutgens brought him up this morning. They started shortly after midnight."

"Forli is here, too?" Corona asked in perplexity.

"Yes; he has gone down to the church to get the picture."

"I was just telling Lutgens how we asked the curate——" Kent started to say.

"But Forli," Maravene broke in, "says that the curate knows nothing about it. At any rate, we shall see presently. He said he would be back before noon, with the picture."

Corona could not help speaking directly to Kent:

"Why did you not go down with him?"

"He'd already gone when I awoke," Kent explained.

"No reason to wait," said Maravene. "We arrived just after dawn, and had breakfasted before any one was up. Forli suddenly decided that he might as well get the picture here for Mr. Kent to examine at his leisure, and make up later on for loss of sleep."

"I am very eager to see it," she said.

"You will see it soon, I think," Maravene returned. "I understand from Mr. Kent that he is going to call you into consultation on it."

Corona spoke to Kent next:

"I understand that Barbara has sud-

denly left for Rome. It seems rather unusual." She glanced at Maravene, and saw a stolid face.

Kent seemed a little uneasy.

"Yes," said he. "Mrs. Henley asked us both back to Rome for some sort of reception in her honor given by one of the British colony. I—didn't want to go, Corona. But Barbara wished very much to go, and so I gave her my consent. It appears that Mrs. Henley especially urged her after my refusal, and, of course, I had no real objection to offer." Kent's eyes twinkled here. "Mrs. Henley, I am led to believe," he continued, "has some sort of match or other in view for Barbara, and of course Barbara couldn't miss that."

"Oh, your daughter is not here at the castle, then?" Maravene asked in solicitude.

Corona would have been far more apprehensive about Barbara's return to Rome, if Maravene had not appeared at the castle almost simultaneously with the girl's departure. She could scarcely believe that Barbara could have been so eager to return to Mrs. Henley, whom she despised; much less for any such motive as Kent had assigned. But, credible or not, the facts were as they were, and surely Barbara could come to no great harm with Mrs. Henley as long as Maravene was here at Forli. Therefore Corona dismissed the matter from her mind.

But not for long. Less than an hour later it was thrust back upon her with appalling import. She had left the men and returned to the house, when presently there was delivered a note to her that Maravene wished at once to see her in private. He suggested the road down to the village as a meeting place, as soon as she could manage it. There was something sinister, something oddly peremptory about his message which, combined with the immeasurable audacity of his coming here, gave Corona a warning that she should comply with this

request. Hence she returned word to him making an immediate appointment, and herself set off by a short path down the slope of the terrace to meet the winding high road.

She had not long to wait for Maravene, nor did he waste time in introducing his mission.

"I must give you unbounded credit for the way you cloaked your surprise at seeing me here this morning," he said.

"Rather a futile thing for you to have done under the circumstances—coming here, I mean."

"Not so futile as you may think. You've simply precipitated matters, you know; simply pushed things to a climax where we've got to drive them through. And we are driving them, and you, I think, will help us."

They walked at slow pace toward the village.

"What do you mean by my help?"

"Let me tell you first what has happened. I did not misspeak when I told you that you had precipitated the affair. You bringing Kent here, your taking him down to the little church, your wiring me that there was no picture here——"

"But I do not believe there is a picture here."

"But there is. And Kent shall see it before long. And he will ask your opinion of it. And you will say, I think, that it is genuine."

"That remains to be seen."

"Yes, that is true. That remains to be seen." He paused for a moment, and then went on: "I may as well tell you that young Forli and I have staked everything we possess on selling this picture to Kent, and we must succeed at any cost. If you had not interfered, if this unforeseeable circumstance of your being here had not simply ruined all our plans, we could have done it."

"What have I to do with it? If it is a genuine Giorgione, I am sure that I shall help you all I can. There is no

one whom I would rather see possess a Giorgione than Mr. Kent; and there is no one whom I would rather see make a commission from selling one, than you. Is it genuine, or not?"

"I am sure I do not know. I have never seen it. But it must be sold for one. I am sorry, Corona, but we are wasting time now. I may as well tell you what I mean. Let's leave the subject for a minute. You know about Barbara Kent's having gone to Rome? I suppose you think that her visit to Mrs. Henley is—is quite innocuous."

"I don't know what to think of it."

"The point is this: if Kent does not pay a quarter of a million dollars for this picture, he will find his daughter either—a social outcast, or else married to me to save her reputation."

"He's not the man to stand for blackmail of that sort."

"I know he isn't. We don't intend to blackmail him. We know we would fail."

"What then?"

"We expect you to advise him to buy. He knows nothing of his daughter. He need know nothing if you advise him to buy the picture at our price. If you advise him to buy, and he does buy, at our price, Barbara will come back to him quite unharmed."

"Then you are blackmailing me?"

"If you care to put it that way. If you care enough about Barbara, or about Kent himself to save him the pain of knowing about Barbara and me, then surely you can pass your opinion to Kent that the picture is worth the price. It costs you nothing to say that."

"I shall pass my honest opinion about it."

"Have you thought it over seriously enough? I doubt if you have. Perhaps you may underestimate the strength of my position. Let me tell you that there is no escape for Barbara."

"But she is now with Mrs. Henley. What can you do about it?"

"Mrs. Henley is on my side now, as desperate as I am. She is as stricken with poverty as I am—not sure even of her hotel bill."

"But she would never take a chance of antagonizing Kent," Corona objected.

"They have already broken. Kent turned her flat by telegram yesterday. She has no more to hope from him. She is as desperate as I."

"Never!"

"The truth, nevertheless. I perceive that you are regarding all this too lightly, probably because you do not believe that I can do what I say I can. Let me put my position more plainly to you. Mrs. Henley and I were both afraid of your influence over Kent. So much you can imagine. We decided between us to destroy it. I told Mrs. Henley what—well, about the old affair between us. She wrote Kent about it yesterday, telling him that she thought you an unfit influence for his daughter. She invited them both back to Rome, as Kent told you this morning; and she confidently expected that Kent and Barbara would come dashing back to Rome to her. But his reaction was most unexpected. He sent her a scurrilous telegram——"

"Guido, are you sure?" Corona asked, knowing now what lay behind that.

"I saw it myself. Kent is in love with you, I guess. At any rate, he turned Mrs. Henley flatter than any woman has ever been turned to my knowledge."

"Go on," breathed Corona.

"Then, of course, we decided that more desperate means should be employed. Mrs. Henley was more than ever desperate at that, as you can imagine. And I as well. We hit upon this other plan then. Of course, I know a little about Barbara's infatuation for me, since you had warned me to keep away from her. It wasn't difficult to draw certain conclusions from that, and certain plans. Mrs. Henley wired Bar-

bara this morning to come at once to her at Rome, since she had discovered something between you and me, which she wanted at once to communicate to her. Barbara went, as you know. And she'll not come back here until Kent has bought this picture at our price; unless, that is, she comes back as my wife."

"You'd never dare. Both you and Mrs. Henley have a name to maintain, after all; you'd never resort to blackmail, kidnaping—whatever must be resorted to."

"Neither kidnaping nor blackmail. If Kent does not contract to buy that picture from us to-day at our price, certain people of undoubted social standing will find her in my rooms to-night. She will have come there of her own accord; but she can save herself only by marrying me. And, incidentally, I am no longer at the *Britannique*. I may tell you that you would find it rather difficult to find either me or Barbara or Mrs. Henley in the short time that will elapse between this moment and the climax. It's all too well arranged, Corona, to be tampered with. You can't escape, nor Barbara. You, of course, can sacrifice Barbara if you care to. How much difference would all this make to Kent? You should consider that rather seriously. And I plainly see that you are taking it seriously."

And, indeed, it needed no such keen perceptions as Maravene's to apprehend how cruelly Corona suffered under the ultimatum. It was manifested in more ways than by her sudden pallor, and the pain in her fine eyes; she seemed to wither visibly, as if the life had gone out of her. Yet not even she was aware to what extent her suffering was advertised to Maravene, for she made an attempt to dispel his assurance.

"Do you expect me to tell you immediately that I accept? That I admit myself trapped? You should know me better than that, Guido."

As Maravene watched her, a change

came upon him. There was that in his new attitude that suggested a sudden tenderness in his eyes, if only one could have seen behind those thick lenses of his; and his voice verified the suggestion.

"Corona, I am beastly sorry. I hate to hurt you."

"Well——" she began, and stopped.

"Corona, I'd rather hurt any woman in the world than you. I'm beastly sorry. When I think back—I wonder if ever I loved woman as I did you."

"Of all things, don't speak to me of that now."

He grew hard again, selfish and dominating.

"But however sorry I may be, it can't be helped now. I am desperate—completely desperate. The affair must go on as we have planned it. It can cost you nothing. You have merely to tell Kent that you consider the picture genuine, and a good buy at the price——" He was wheedling her now.

"Wait until we see the picture," was all she said.

They heard footsteps coming down the road at no great distance, a man's footsteps, walking spryly. Engrossed in their own affairs as they had been, the man was almost upon them before they were warned of his approach.

"If that chances to be Kent," Maravene whispered to her fiercely, "you are not to tell him a word of this, or there is no saving Barbara."

It was Kent. He came around the curve in the road above them just as Corona turned her head toward the source of the sounds. Even at that distance, there was evident on Kent's face the shock of surprise he felt at finding Maravene and Corona loitering here together. The sight checked his steps on the instant, and made him stare at them in a manner unwittingly rude. But only for a second, for he came on toward them as briskly as ever, even though the astonishment had not yet left his face.

"I got rather impatient about young Forli and the Giorgione," said he by way of explanation of his presence, "and decided to walk down to the village again to see about it."

"And I," said Maravene easily, "was on my way down myself. I can't think what detains Forli so long. Shall we go on together?"

Corona could not but admire the man who thus easily turned to his own advantage what might have been defeat. She found Kent's eyes upon her in question, and suddenly realized what prompted that unspoken inquiry. What could he be thinking of her, to find her here in almost stealthy conversation with Maravene after having read—or so Maravene had told her—Eve Henley's account of her earlier affair with Maravene? But no hint of uneasiness betrayed her. She asked naturally:

"May I come with you?"

Thus the three of them went on to the village, Maravene making talk all the way, and leading it far from any dangerous channels. It seemed to Corona that Maravene loitered unnecessarily, though he made no obvious attempt to check their progress through the cobbled street of the village, across the public square, and straight up to the broad, worn stone steps of the church. Again the sacristan met them at the small door. Maravene had pushed himself forward, and made himself their spokesman:

"Have you seen his excellency the Duke of Forli here this morning?" he asked the old man.

"Si, signore, he is even now with the *padre curato*. Will you come in?"

Corona saw Maravene bite his lip and look a trifle worried. Nevertheless, he stepped back suavely and motioned for Corona to enter, and Kent after her. The sacristan, meantime, had gone ahead to announce the new callers. The aged priest came toward them as he had come the morning before toward Corona

and Kent; but this time young Forli followed him, a broad-shouldered, well-built young man who, in face and attitude and tailoring, looked more English than Italian.

Again the curate greeted his old acquaintances, and acknowledged the young duke's introduction to Maravene under the name of Lutgens. Then he said:

"It was only yesterday morning that I told you there could be no painting in the church without my knowing it. It is possible that I was in error. When I arrived here this morning for the early service, I found his excellency already here. The sacristan informed me that he had come in very early, and had sought admission to the crypt where his great-grandfather rests. The duke informs me, and has at great pains tried to persuade me, that the Giorgione in question was deposited in a leaden case within the outer lining of the sarcophagus. He found the leaden case, and brought it to me. It is now in my study. If you care to examine it, will you be good enough to come with me? Remember that I can vouch for nothing. I was not here when the duke came to the church, and was not present when he found the case."

He ushered them back to his study, a small, bare room looking to the east, white-washed and sweet with the scent of fresh flowers in a little vase on the stone window sill. A rough table stood in the middle of the room, on which there was a row of well-worn books, an inkstand and pens, some scattered sheets of manuscript, and, most vividly in view, a battered casket of lead some two feet long and not above six inches square, dust begrimed and age worn.

Kent sprang forward with eager interest to examine it.

"But it cannot open. It is sealed hermetically."

"Yes; I have looked into that," Forli explained. "The casket was made open

on the end; and after the picture was inserted the end cap was put on and sealed. It is not heavy. The lead must be thin. I can easily cut it with a case knife; or, perhaps, even a penknife. Have you a penknife, Lutgens?"

Maravene gave him his knife. They all looked on in almost breathless suspense while young Forli with deft carefulness cut the long surfaces through close to the cap on the end. This delicate task completed, he drew out a roll of oiled paper tied with a silken cord; which, upon being undone, revealed a canvas about two feet square, rolled with the color side out. Very carefully Forli unrolled this flat upon the priest's work table where the light from the east windows focused full upon it, and with a gesture beckoned his spectators nearer him. The painting represented the "Nativity of Paris."

Kent spoke first:

"Marvelously preserved! As fresh as if the last brush stroke had just been given it. Not a flake of color missing."

"What do you think of it, Miss Strickland?" Forli asked.

"Surely you wouldn't expect me to pass an opinion on it so soon," Corona said, and felt Maravene's eyes squarely upon her.

Kent had whipped out a microscope and was examining the picture, his face giving signs of no emotion save the eagerness of an amateur. Corona reached out and felt the waxed paper lightly. Kent saw her gesture and, mistaking her interest, proffered her the glass.

"No, thanks," she said, looking at Maravene.

"Won't you examine it, Miss Strickland?" he said.

"Quite useless for me to examine it," she replied.

"Why?" Forli asked.

"Because this is paraffined paper, and paraffined paper had not been heard of when the duke's great-grandfather was

laid in his coffin." Again she felt Maravene's eyes upon her from behind his thick lenses, and she added, as if actuated by a sudden defiance of him: "I think there could be no further proof that the painting is not authentic, to say the least."

CHAPTER VIII.

Corona and Kent walked back to the castle together. Forli and Maravene lingered behind. Kent, characteristically, was busy with his considerations of the "amazing audacity—fake—imposition—your clarity of vision——" and so on without end; and this preoccupation left Corona free to take stock of more pressing affairs.

Maravene's account of his plot against Barbara rang too true to be doubted. That unscrupulousness which dire need of money had always led him into—to some degree against his will, as if he were a worm wriggling in helpless rebellion upon the hook of circumstance—that very unscrupulousness would lead him to any lengths in Barbara's case. Clever, too, when he was aroused to it, Maravene was. She had so often seen how, under the infatuation of a new affair, he could rise to really great heights; and she had no doubt but that the rousing influence of dire need would be just as stimulating. Barbara's infatuation for him, furthermore, would be of great assistance in the execution of any plot he might formulate.

Should she tell Kent about it? She decided against it. Man was ever a blunderer. To pile Barbara's infatuation for Maravene atop of this shock of the man's duplicity would enrage Kent undoubtedly to the point of egregious error. She had seen examples of the violence of the wrath of this usually well-controlled man when he was aroused to righteous anger. What anger more righteous than that engendered by this? And, dominated as he was by his man's honor and scruples,

could he hope to combat Maravene successfully? The answer was written plainly enough. It would be serious folly, with no advantage to be gained therefrom. Only herself, who knew Maravene so well, could hope to extricate Barbara from the trap which Maravene, with the connivance of Eve Henley, had set for the girl.

She thought of wiring the embassy in Rome, or the police. But of what avail that, save only mortification for Barbara?

She realized, of course, that she must get down to Rome at the earliest possible moment. How to manage that? Barbara had taken Kent's car. There was none in the village that she could hire. To get one from Rome by telegram was a matter of hours' delay, and the train service was no better. There remained only the car that Maravene and young Forli had come up in. She saw it as they reached the castle, standing in the courtyard, the chauffeur dozing on the back seat; and as she saw it a bold stroke occurred to her.

Without explanation she left Kent and went into her apartments for coat and money. On the way out, she called for the duchess.

"I have been suddenly called to Rome," Corona said. "I am forced to ask your assistance. I am simply hiring the car your son came up in. Will you please keep them here—your son and his friend—as long as you can?"

The duchess' fine black eyes instantly showed the wound.

"My son? Has he been doing you harm?"

"No, no, not your son. The other man. It is he; not at all your son. I give you my word that your son has nothing to do with it. I regret that I must inconvenience him by taking his car, but I must. And you will contrive to keep them here as long after I am gone as you can, will you not?"

"I shall do my best. But I can't let

you go like this. If it is a serious matter—and I know from your manner that it is—you, a stranger, a foreigner, in Rome—thieves and bandits and worse—but there is your friend Mr. Kent. He is going with you, of course."

"No, no, I can't take him. You must explain to him only that I am suddenly called away, and shall be back with you all soon."

"You can't explain to him?" the duchess repeated. "Then I know. It is an affair of his daughter, who went away so early this morning. I know. His daughter—and this friend of my son's."

"Yes; but you are not to tell Mr. Kent."

"Oh, my dear, let her go the way of her own choosing. You are running into danger—I feel it—such dangers as you know not of. Let her go her way. Life is just opening for you now. Let her go. Why risk it all—all this you have just found?"

"I know the life she is choosing, and I would save any woman from it. Please do all I have asked you to. Good-by."

It was no difficult matter to rehire the chauffeur of the hired car who, in accepting Corona's fare, took no other risks than disappointing his previous passengers, which meant nothing to him, since Corona paid him twice what they had paid.

In this fashion she anticipated Maravene in her return to Rome, and reached the Porta Pia with no other plan in view than to find Eve Henley—or Barbara, which she assumed amounted to the same thing. Maravene, to be sure, had warned her that this would be no easy matter; but at that time Maravene had had no idea that Corona would be so soon in Rome.

And yet the anticipation was of no avail to her—worked her harm, rather than otherwise. Whereas Eve Henley had not definitely left her hotel, she was

nevertheless not to be found there. Corona recalled that Mrs. Henley was to be present at some reception or other in Rome that night, and through Bobby Forrest of the embassy she managed to get a list of the likely social affairs of that evening where Mrs. Henley might be found. More than that she could not do. The rest of the day she spent idly waiting at the hotel where Mrs. Henley lived.

Mrs. Henley came in, however, late in the afternoon, presumably to dress for dinner. The fact was announced to Corona by a diligent bell boy subsidized to that end. Corona immediately sent her name in to the woman and, to her relief as well as surprise, received a welcome—at any rate, that which passed for one.

Mrs. Henley, vivid in an afternoon gown of striking if nameless hue, was the only spot of color in the dingy, overfurnished suite. She met Corona at the door, and herself opened the conversation:

"It's incredible, your coming to me, Miss Strickland. Has anything happened? Mr. Kent, perhaps? Did he return to Rome with you?"

"No; I came down about Barbara. She's not with you?"

"Barbara? No, I've not seen her. Is she in Rome?" she returned with indifferent acting.

"Her father said she had come to you."

"Oh, but she's not here. There's a mistake. I am so worried. Has she—run away? Eloped?"

"I think not. You don't care to tell me anything about her, I gather."

"I've told you all I know about her. I have as many questions to ask about her as you have."

"Guido Maravene said she had come to you. He told me the whole thing, you know."

Swift worry sharpened her blue eyes for a moment.

"Maravene? Who is Maravene, may I ask?"

"Lutgens, then. The collector."

"The whole affair surprises me as much as you."

"You surely will not try to tell me that you do not know Lutgens."

"Yes, I know him. I met him at Mr. Kent's. You were there."

"He, by the way, has left the Brittanique. Do you know where he is living now?"

Mrs. Henley did not at once reply. For some reason not at all clear to Corona until hours afterward, she seemed to be weighing affairs of importance. Yet it was no more than half a second before she answered:

"The address he gave me—in fact, I went to see him this very afternoon concerning a small objet d'art—is—let me see—42 Rione di Martello, behind the Colosseum, or in that vicinity. I do not know Rome very well. Any cabman will know."

"Thanks very much."

Corona knew that she could gain no more information from Mrs. Henley, and departed. She went at once to Maravene's address, and found it to be the ordinary type of palazzo, or apartment house with cheap, furnished apartments. The door man in the porter's lodge conducted her to Maravene's without question, whence she assumed that he might have had it for a longer time than she knew. No one answered their knock, and again she was faced with impatient waiting for whatever happened next.

She felt sure that Maravene, or perhaps Barbara, would eventually come there. On the opposite side of the street, and but a few doors down, she saw a decent-looking little restaurant, one of many such in that neighborhood which catered especially to foreign visitors, advertised by its trim hedge of box trees in wooden tubs along the sidewalk. Entering this, she found a vacant

table near the window whence she could command a view of the entrance to the apartment house, and ordered tea as an excuse for waiting. She lingered there until twilight all but shut off her view, and further espionage of that sort was rendered impossible. Then, paying her check, she walked slowly back past the palazzo. And as she came directly opposite the entrance, Maravene and young Forli drove up in a cab.

She stopped and looked at them. Her abrupt halt drew their attention to her. Maravene got out and crossed the street, with small regard for traffic, to greet her.

"I wonder if you realize, Corona, that you have everything to lose and nothing to gain by this completely vain interference of yours."

He was in a temper, of course. She recalled that his tempers were flashes—violent and short.

"What does that mean, Guido?"

"It merely means that—that— Do you think I would be ass enough to let you have your way with me in this business? Of course not. What did you ever hope to gain by coming down to Rome as you did? I telegraphed immediately I knew you had come, and put everything out of your reach. You may as well go back to Forli for all the good you can do here. What I told you I am going to do, I am going to do; and you can't stop it. Did you, by the way, get anything from Eve Henley? Isn't that proof enough to you that you can do nothing?"

She permitted him to continue his tirade uninterrupted. He told the truth in his tempers; duplicity was not then in him. She could very well surmise how difficult, how futile her errand was likely to be. Of course he would have wired; his ingenuity and providence had always checkmated her, and never more than now. Of Barbara she had no trace. To call in the embassy or the police now would more than ever yield publicity for

the girl, and such assistance would be too late to save her from Maravene. But one other way out occurred to her.

When at last he stopped, she said:

"I am wondering a little if you know what you are talking about."

That unexpected rebuttal to his wrath caught him up short.

"What do you mean? Aren't you here to find Barbara Kent? And to keep her away from me?"

She met his eyes as squarely as she could behind his thick lenses.

"What if I am? Do you know the motive behind it?"

"Motive? What motive? Of course I know your motive. The same motive that actuates you to do me in at every turn."

"If that is true, why didn't I tell the Kents far sooner about you? I wish I had, now."

He was studying her carefully now.

"What motive do you mean, Corona?"

"I can't stand here talking with you in the streets like this. Will you give me dinner? I can talk with you more comfortably, more fully."

He looked worried at that, glanced across the street at young Forli, who was waiting, and snatched a look at his watch.

"Oh, here, any place near here will do, Guido," she said. "This little restaurant down the street. It's clean. I had tea there. It's near. You'll not lose any time."

"Corona, what is it you want to talk with me about?" he asked, softening, irresolute under the spell of a seduction she had put into her voice.

"Tell me, Guido," she asked as with a sudden passion to know the most important of all truth, "do you love Barbara Kent?"

Again he searched her intently.

"What has that to do with the affair?"

"Everything, to me."

"Everything—to you?" he repeated slowly. "Corona, you're—you're trying

to—to blandish me——” He halted; and then continued with sudden decision: “Yes, we’ll have dinner together. Will you wait for me a minute? I must tell young Forli.”

He passed the very briefest word to Forli, and rejoined her within two minutes. And minutes later she was facing him across the coarse, clean linen of the little table by an open window, with nothing but the greenery of the boxwood trees between them and the street.

With that practiced fastidiousness of choice, a somehow subtle divination of what she most fancied, an ability of his she had found attractive in the first of those old days, he ordered dinner and one of the rarer vintages of Montefiascone. She watched him as he gave intelligent and detailed directions to the waiter. He was a man of not yet forty, whose square jaw and virile face stamped him as possessed of a force which she knew he did not have; a man whose sensitive lips and nostrils indicated the capacity for finer artistic perceptions and appreciations, which she knew he did not possess to any such degree as himself, and herself once upon a time, and most people who knew him, thought he possessed; a man of a queer, twisted nature, more to be pitied than despised.

To what extent must she play her part with him? And for how long? Not for long, certainly, for Barbara could not disappear for many days. To what lengths must she go during that time, to play her part successfully? She had no doubt but that she could do it; for on every occasion she had been face to face with Maravene during the past days, she had seen evidences of his old passion for her flaming up in him.

“Well, Guido,” she laughed as the waiter departed, “you’ve not lost your gourmet’s artistry.”

He grimaced.

“I’ve lost nothing, nor gained any-

thing, since you left me. I’ve been static. That’s the devil of it. A man can’t progress without the right woman.”

“And I suppose you’ve been looking for her ever since you accused me of failing you. Guido”—she leaned forward in her earnestness, in successful dissimulation—“did I really fail you?”

His answer was an explosion after a second of looking at her:

“No; never, Corona. I was the rotter; I the weak one. You were always the strong one, always right. How I have needed you.”

“And do you think that Barbara Kent can supply that need?”

“What a silly, silly question! You know the truth about that. I’m desperate. Life owes me something; I must collect it in my fashion. Upon my soul, you look pleased, relieved—something. Corona, tell me, why did you put to me that question about her?”

“Oh, Guido, don’t you understand? Don’t you know women well enough to know——”

He leaped at the bait:

“Corona, you’re jealous of her.”

She clearly accepted the imputation by passing it over.

“I hated to see you throw yourself away in this fashion. There is something better than that in you. I think—I’ve been thinking all the time that it is not you, but young Forli, who is really behind this all. I suddenly wanted to save you before it was too late, and you would not save yourself. You would not believe me. You’ve no idea how I pitied you when the exposure about the Giorgione had to be made this morning—clearly Forli’s doings, and not yours.”

“Corona!”

“Well?”

“And yet—this doesn’t tally with—with your attitude toward me these last few days. Corona, what am I to believe?”

She withdrew within her shell.

"Believe what you want to. You must give me credit for having some pride, at least. Believe what you want to, and I shall leave you as soon as dinner is over."

"You mystify me. I don't know what to think."

"How much more do you want me to say? Would you expect me to say anything more?"

"Corona, will you come to my rooms across the street here, and talk this over with me?"

"To your rooms?"

"Yes; we must talk. Why not?" He watched her hesitation. "Ah," he scoffed, "now I understand."

"You are too quick to understand. Yes, I will come to your rooms with you."

"Now? When we are finished here?"

"Yes. Immediately."

CHAPTER IX.

That event, which Eve Henley had confidently anticipated when she so readily gave to Corona Maravene's new address, soon came to pass. Maravene's wire to her from Forli, warning her against Corona, conveyed to her as well the information that Kent planned to arrive in Rome on the evening train. Hence she was not unprepared for the announcement to her, as she dressed for dinner, of Kent's name, with the message that his call on her was pressing and important. She kept him waiting, with good excuse, for a period that was sufficiently provocative of impatience. And when finally she sent for him she was ready for whatever part had to be played.

He, in a state of dishevelment unusual to him, because of his trying day, was assuredly still in a bad mood with her, however civilly he greeted her. She refused to recognize any hostility.

"I'm so glad you came. I felt sure you would ultimately. You're just in

time. I'm dining at the Sammarco, and you'll have time to change and meet me there, to go on to the Maitlands' reception. They'll be awfully disappointed if you don't come."

"Sorry! I didn't come here for that."

"Oh! Are you still angry at me for doing what appeared to me to be my duty?" she asked him.

He chose to overlook her query.

"I came to see Barbara. It appears that something has happened to her—or likely to."

"Happen? To your daughter? What, I should like to know?"

"I don't know. I can't imagine what, nor why. The duchess told me—the Duchessa di Forli. Miss Strickland told her. She came to Rome suddenly, inexplicably——" Kent was struggling to find words.

"Yes, I know. Miss Strickland is here. She came here to see Monsieur Lutgens."

Kent bridled at that, but controlled himself.

"She came here to see Barbara. Where is Barbara?"

"Well, I must admit that I don't know where she may be at this moment. She's been playing about Rome this afternoon—some one from your embassy. She was to meet me at the Sammarco and go on with me to the Maitlands'."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Of what can any one be sure? I only know what she said."

"But Miss Strickland—— I'm puzzled. Miss Strickland was so sure; acted as if—— And she's not a woman to fly off the handle. Or perhaps the duchess imagined too much."

"Miss Strickland is in Rome," Mrs. Henley volunteered. "She came here to me. She was looking—you'll be very, very angry when I tell you this, because you hurt me awfully when I did for you what I thought was my duty by you and your daughter——"

"Your duty—to revile her?"

"Is it revilement to tell the truth, when the truth should be known?"

"The truth in this case is my affair, not yours."

"You choose not yet to believe it?"

"Believe it or not, it's of no consequence to me what happened years ago; not after I've known Miss Strickland as long as I have since then."

"What happened years ago is happening now, this very moment, I have no doubt."

"Now? Happening now?"

"Yes! Miss Strickland came to Rome to see Lutgens, and for no other reason."

"If she came to see him, it was for some other reason than the one you insinuate."

"Is it fair of you to scorn me in this fashion? Is it fair of any man to deal so cavalierly with any woman? Will you, out of justice to me, take the trouble to investigate? Will you be just with me, or not? Yes, I mean it in just that fashion. You've wounded me very deeply, insulted me; and I think that out of justice alone you should look into the matter."

Kent arose suddenly under the goad of wrath but barely controlled. His voice trembled as he said:

"Since you put it that way, I can do nothing else. Yes, I will do anything you say."

"Come with me, then, to his rooms—to Lutgens' rooms. If she is not there now, perhaps waiting for him, perhaps with him, then, at least, you shall have proof that she has been there; and, if you care to wait, you will see her stealing her way in again. Will you come? Are you prepared against the shock?"

She saw him blench under the conviction of her own emphasis, and then saw him mentally dismiss the suspicion and steel himself against her unpleasant inuendo.

"Yes, I am prepared against any such

shock as I am likely to find awaiting me. Are you going now?"

"At once, if you will. I am due for dinner at eight. Let us hurry."

In the vestibule of the hotel, Kent excused himself for a moment and left her, going in the direction of the public lounge room. Out of curiosity, she followed him, to see him address a slender, graceful, patrician-looking woman dressed in black, against which her snowy hair made telling contrast. She heard what he said:

"I must beg your indulgence for a few minutes. I am setting out on a pressing affair. Can I do anything to make you more comfortable while you wait for me? Or perhaps send you on to my apartment, where I can assure you—"

"I will wait here. I shall be very comfortable. Is it anything alarming?" she replied.

"I think not. I shall come back for you very soon."

He rejoined Eve who, by this time, was back where he had left her, and, without explanation of the interim, put himself again in her hands. They drove by cab direct to Maravene's address in the Rione di Martello.

"I know his apartment," Eve explained as she led the way through the porter's lodge. "I was here only to-day, in search of some little object as a—token to you."

Kent followed her without reply. She rapped confidently. After a space of waiting Maravene came himself to the door. He had no servant. Eve greeted him with that inflection exactly indicative of their difference in station.

"May we come in for a moment—Mr. Kent and I? A matter of business."

"Sorry. I happen to be engaged just now."

"It is important business that cannot be postponed. Mr. Kent is leaving Rome to-night, I think; or early to-

morrow morning, and will have no other opportunity."

As Corona had so often done, Eve Henley wished very much that she could know what was going on behind those peering, thick-lensed spectacles of his. Admittedly to her great surprise, he backed away and asked them in. They followed him through the long hall into a small living room. There they found Corona, standing in the middle of the room to face them, her hat and motor coat on a table by which she stood. Eve Henley thought she must have tried to put on her hat and coat when she heard them coming in, and had not had time to do it; she was so sure of it, that she was already formulating the charge in case she was called upon to make it.

But she was not called upon to make it, nor was it any part of Corona's plan. She had stood up in a moment of indecision when the identity of Maravene's callers was first borne to her ears. But her indecision vanished when she heard Maravene admit them. Knowing him as she did, she was quick at reading his purposes. She knew as well as he did what his purpose was in admitting his callers. Never too sure of her, however much and in whatever fashion he loved her, Maravene intended to make use of this chance meeting as a final proof of her real allegiance to him. If she admitted her love for him before these close friends of hers, he would be convinced; if she denied it, then he would know that she had been merely play acting to delay his plot against Barbara Kent. So much Corona knew before the visitors arrived to face her.

More than that she knew as soon as she saw Kent's present state. To tell him now that she was doing this for Barbara's sake, to tell him that Barbara was infatuated to the point of folly with Maravene, would now, more than ever, goad him to inconsiderate rage and accomplish no purpose save useless regrets

for himself. Hence she faced them with no obscurity of intention.

Kent spoke first, after his quick eyes had gathered, from her coat and hat on the table, the friendly nature of her call on Maravene.

"Corona!" was all he said, but his eyes, craving explanation or pity, never left hers.

"I am sure," Eve Henley spoke up, "that we had no notion of interrupting a tête-à-tête of such charming intimacy."

Kent turned on her.

"On the contrary, we did. We came here just for this. Oh, Corona, how could you? How could I have done this? You—I know you have some explanation for it."

Corona felt Maravene's eyes upon her, like an owl's from some dark corner. She did not falter in her reply.

"Sorry, Walbridge, but there is no explanation. I—have found that an attraction between Guido and me, of some long standing, is as—as fresh—as——" she hesitated.

Kent put his hand out to the table, and, though it shook, leaned upon it.

"I can't believe it. I can't!"

"Does it make so very much difference to you? I don't know what further proof——"

"But last night at Forli, Corona! Last night! Don't you remember?"

Corona shut her eyes against his, and stepped back a little into the deeper shadows. After a little she said:

"Must I tell you that what you call 'last night at Forli' was only to show you how little worthily you really loved—Mrs. Henley. I think you know it yet, even though— Walbridge, you must know it."

He started a little, as if—or so one might have thought—he wanted to come nearer to her; but all he did was straighten himself and look at Mrs. Henley.

"Yes, I know that, at least," he said, with a thick, slow tongue.

"Let us get away from here," said Eve Henley, cloaking her anger.

Kent looked at her strangely.

"You may go when and how you want to. I must think. I shall go alone. Yes; the duchess. I must look to her. Corona, if you could only tell me—the mere words, I think, would help——" His voice held a pleading note.

"What do words mean, after all?" she said, and conquered an impulse to guide his blind groping at least to the door.

Mrs. Henley offered so much, and he refused her gruffly.

"Madame, will you go your way and leave me alone?" he said. "If you have either pride or shame, will you go out of my sight, or I shall forget that you are a woman."

No one, not even Eve Henley, could stand against that, in Kent's tone of voice; and she left without more words. She was not permitted even to save her face.

Kent followed her out, almost simultaneously, but as far removed from her as if continents lay between them. He returned to the hotel in a separate cab, and gave orders to the cabman to make all possible speed, hoping to arrive there before Mrs. Henley, so that he might get the duchess and take her away to his own apartment before he should be forced again to face the other woman. In that, his *cocchiere* permitted him to succeed, but he could not so quickly get away from the hotel. For Barbara was there, talking with the duchess. If Kent had been in any state to take note of such subtleties, he would have realized that she was strangely grave and subdued. Both women greeted him with looks that were more eloquent than their words. Under the keenness of the duchess' black eyes, Kent felt uneasy and was glad when at last Barbara spoke to him:

"Father, whatever has happened to you?"

"Nothing."

Whereat the duchess made haste to speak:

"*Amico mio*, you cannot deceive me. The universe is reeling about you. I think I know why. - You have just come from Corona."

"Well?" Kent asked blindly.

Barbara was at his side.

"Father, is that true? And what about it?"

Kent got a grip on himself.

"Yes, it is true. She is with Lutgens. They are friends of long standing. I didn't know." His voice shook in spite of himself.

"They—together?" cried Barbara, staring wide at him. "I thought that was finished years ago." Barbara, to Kent's surprise, turned to the duchess with an appealing look. "Otherwise," she told her, "I—believe me, I would not have come down to Rome to-day. I thought she was really in love with father, and—and finished with Lutgens. I wouldn't for worlds have interfered, if I had thought she still loved him."

Kent, hearing this, spoke rather gruffly to her.

"What's this? I don't understand. You came down to Rome—why did you come to Rome alone?"

Barbara did not at once speak. It was the duchess who, with a new fire in her eyes, saw farther now than any of them, and spoke with a flaming enthusiasm.

"Signor Kent, let me tell you many things that I now see clearly. Barbara, your daughter, came to Rome to-night because she is in love, or thinks she is, with the man Lutgens. Corona knows it; knew——"

"What?" Kent broke in. "You in love with him? That—that— Why, do you know who he is, or what he is?" he asked her.

"The duchess has been telling me. I didn't know before."

"You know about the picture——"

"Let us not waste time," the duchess broke in. "Let us all go at once and fetch Corona."

"And fetch Corona?" Kent echoed. "What do you mean? Intrude again upon her?"

Whereat the duchess laughed in silver tones.

"Intrude? Intrude on the profoundest torture? My friend, let me tell you: we women who have suffered know things that you men cannot know. If you must have an explanation in words, I shall make it to you as we go to her."

Already she was leading the way out of the room, and the others followed as it—and indeed they were—they were dominated by some superior force of her will.

"Still I don't understand," Kent said. "Come! Hurry!" the duchess told him again, rushing him on. "If you need words, I shall make them as we go—all the words you want. But you will find at the end that they mean no more than you know already."

And thus the three of them went to Corona.



HARBINGER

MOON, soaring like a still, white swan,
Majestical and slow
Over the hills of Carcassonne,
The towers of Bergamo—

Bird of remembrance, bird of rest,
Go softly down the night;
Guard well our dreams beneath your breast,
However long the flight.

Then, when your weary pinions beat
Against the doors of dawn,
Hover above her silent street
In far-off Carcassonne!

Drop at her window ledge one lone
White feather for my sake,
And she will know what wind has blown,
Who kissed her eyes awake!

LESLIE NELSON JENNINGS.

Alice Aforethought

By Beatrix Demarest Lloyd

Author of "The Hostess Woman,"
"John Jay Galbraith and Valet"



SPENCER HOWARD—he had happily been knighted for his distinguished achievements as author and actor soon after his marriage to Lady Alice Mountullibardine—lay stretched at long length in a canvas chair, his hands behind his head, his eyes looking fairly drugged with the beauty of the Naples bay. It was the drowsy hour after luncheon, and Sir Spencer was alone upon the terrace of the hotel. A short space before him the black-and-white diamonds of the marble pavement came to an end along a heavy stone balustrade, and immediately beyond this barrier the tops of jade trees with their lemon-yellow fruit showed against the azure sky and matching water. The chair in which he sat and the awning above him were striped with a cheerful red, and he in white flannels with an amber scarf added his personal bit of color to a brilliant composition.

The sunlight beyond the slight shadow of his shelter seemed the warm expression of a pervasive content. Sir Spencer with Lady Howard was on holiday, and, hard-working man that he was, he had no intention of wasting any daylight hours on sleep, but the repose of soul and body in which he for the moment luxuriated was perhaps the next thing to it. To look at his face here and now, placid, expressionless, one would have

seen little to hint the inner man, except the quiet forcefulness. There was but a faint suggestion of his infinite humor and changefulness, subtlety and charm. He looked rich, handsome, and possibly stupid.

The small dark figure of a man drifted past him at some distance, bringing up at the balustrade; a younger man than Sir Spencer, possibly, short, delicate, with a fine Latin head, and large, candid, rather sorrowful eyes. Of these, Sir Spencer saw but one, the man being turned only partly toward him, but from top to toe he had taken the whole man in at one trained glance.

The young man remained, gazing out toward Ischia, a faint blue blot on the horizon. He turned his back upon Sir Spencer to look at Capri—quite pardonably, thought the other. He looked downward into the garden below him, and outward again. Then he sighed, and turned to move away. At sight of Sir Spencer he started slightly, drew back a step, and bowed with the courtesy of a peer.

"Pardon, signore!" he murmured.

"Don't mention it," protested Sir Spencer negligently.

The young man smiled, his rather boyish face pleasantly lighting from an unconcealed gloom.

"A perfect scene," he said softly, with

a southron's gesturing jerk of the chin over the shoulder.

"As you say," assented the other.

"A hard thing, to have to sell such a picture!"

"I do not understand, I am afraid," said Sir Spencer politely.

"Pardon, signore! I have just sold my little villa and a vineyard. When one sells the land, one sells the Mediterranean."

"I see. Yes, I see." Sir Spencer looked out again at the blue water. "Yes, that is a hard thing." His wonderful voice expressed what he did not put into words. He was sorry for the poor devil. Good family, probably—with a nose like that. Impoverished!

The poor devil gave a little laugh, a little cough—both to cover another sound. Again he made a little bow and started away. At the moment Lady Alice, coming out of the near wing of the hotel where they had their rooms, stepped almost into his path. He drew back deferentially, and Sir Spencer rose. With a faint smile, she passed him and came on, her husband drawing up another chair nearer his own.

She, too, was dressed in white, but a cool, filmy white, and underneath a little down-drawn hat her face looked out like that of a pretty child. She had the very fair skin that shows color like a stain in the cheeks, her eyes were larkspur blue, and her hair, which scarcely showed under the brim of her bonnet, was black. She was slim and girlish, and looked a bit spoiled. Very probably she was. She had, moreover, a delusive look of being too pretty to have been endowed with brains. No one knew better than Sir Spencer how completely misleading was her guileless appearance.

"She is bringing them over for tea," she said softly as she sat down in the chair he arranged for her. "That was Brigit on the telephone."

"Ah!" He gave the party a cordial welcome in a monosyllable. Long-leg-

gedly, he stepped over his own chair and resumed his comfort. "Did you notice that chap? For a moment I thought he was going to try to sell me the Bay of Naples."

Lady Alice laughed.

"You do look idiotic to-day."

"It's not the heat; it's the stupidity," he said gently.

"You are," said she, doing characteristic violence to her native tongue, "an illimitable lamb."

He cocked a jolly eye at her, and then said softly:

"The return of the native."

It was in fact the same young man, whose recursion had caught his lifted look.

"Pardon, signore," said the voice again, and he bowed to them both. "I ask a thousand pardons for my intrusion. But the signore was so kind as to speak with me a moment. May I be permitted to say something?"

Sir Spencer's face was blankly agreeable:

"My dear?"

"But, certainly," said Lady Alice, turning a bit to see the man.

"The signora is very kind. I was but just saying to your husband that I have sold my villa and my vineyard. It was his kindness to appreciate that I did it against my heart's wishes. But what would you? Something must go that something else may be held! Permit me to name myself. I am Davido della Diodare." He pulled out a rather large visiting card as he spoke and handed it to her with another bow. But Lady Howard barely looked at it.

"Oh, what a name! What a heavenly name! Davido della Diodare!"

The young man's eyes rested respectfully at some distance from her enchanting face.

"The signora has heard the name?"

"I'm sorry—I ought to know it——"

He made a gesture banishing her hesitation.

"But why, signora? We are only an old family—soldiers most of us. We are not famous, nor rich. We have still a home in Rome, though our villa here is gone, and one in Tuscany. No, signora, it was but a thought. I am on my way to sell this, and I thought——"

He did not finish his sentence but pulled a little roll of tissue paper from his pocket with his right hand, while in the other he confusedly held his hat and stick.

"I am a—a poor salesman, signora, signore! Perhaps it will speak for itself." Blushing as he spoke, he unfastened the rough little package by taking off a mere elastic band, and let the paper unroll. From his fingers hung down a chain of soft, dull, beautifully worked gold flashing with great lakes of green light, a necklace of emeralds. Both Lady Alice and Sir Spencer had an instinctive gesture—she put out her hand, he shrank slightly away.

"It is a family jewel," said Diodare, as he laid it in her hand.

She bent over it, passing it link by link through her fingers. The gold setting was large and out of fashion, but wrought with a charming design of running vines and leaves which held the stones without prongs. The emeralds were great, heavy squares, some more flawed than others, but of a magnificent green. Sir Spencer, leaning down to look at it, murmured an unheard:

"I say, old thing, remember the Mediterranean!"

Lady Howard nudged him away imperceptibly as she looked up. Her blue eyes were bewildered.

"You want to sell this?" she asked.

"I do not want to, signora. I must." He returned her long look and tried to smile bravely. "It has been in my family for generations. I thought the signora might like to see it."

"But——" said Lady Alice. Her eyes went back to the magnificent jewel swinging between her two hands. She

was quite silent a moment; then she said: "What is the value of it?"

"I do not know," said Diodare casually.

Her brows frowned at him.

"You do not know?"

"How could I know, signora?" he asked with his expressive hands as well as with his words. "It is my mother's, my grandmother's—her grandmother's!"

"But do you mean to say you carry it about like that, uninsured?"

He looked at her a little anxiously.

"I had not thought of that. I brought it from my home only to-day."

"Well, what are you going to do with it?"

"I am taking it to Naples, to be appraised, to be sold."

Both his hearers looked up at him.

"Why not have done that in Rome?" asked Sir Spencer.

The young man shook his head.

"I did not wish to sell it in Rome, signore," he said. Suddenly he smiled and pulled out a wallet from his breast pocket. "See," said he, and from its covers took a cheap photograph such as are to be bought in a million Italian shops. "It is my mother's great-great-aunt, painted in the jewels themselves. It hangs in the Galleria Sforza. No, I would not care to sell it in Rome. That is a silly pride, perhaps?"

Alice Howard gave but a glance at the photograph. She remained silent, bending over the jewels that lay, a barbaric splash of color, in her lap. Suddenly she made a most unexpected remark.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Half after two," said Sir Spencer dutifully.

She sprang up.

"I'm going with you," she said to Diodare and handed him back the jewels. A color had come into her delicate face and her eyes were alight. "Come, Spencer. We can get back in plenty of time for tea. Send for Berkeley, and let's go!"

"You are too good, signora," said Diodare, delightfully pleased. Sir Spencer was not so enthusiastic. A hot drive into the dirt and smells of Naples did not attract him. But a swift, surreptitious touch on his arm from the hand that ruled his world decided the matter. Amiably he sighed, and sauntered ahead to order his motor.

"Where to?" he asked, with a negligent good humor, as the others joined him.

But Diodare made an eloquent gesture of self-effacement. "I insist that you decide that," said he.

Lady Alice cast a thoughtful glance at him, then at her husband.

"Perhaps the curator of the museum?" she suggested.

"Well," said Sir Spencer, "as a matter of fact, the very man for this job is in Naples at this moment—Bertolius."

"Bertolius!" she cried. "You mean the man who wrote 'Famous Diamonds?'"

"Just he," assented Sir Spencer. "He's here on business, I believe, but I dare say we can find him at home this time of day."

"He is a good judge of jewels, signore?" asked Diodare anxiously.

"He is the world's greatest authority," answered the other, smiling.

Diodare bowed his odd little bow.

"I am delighted," he said.

They swung out to the road that skirts the cliffs of Sorrento, through the shimmering warmth that only their rapid passage made endurable, past Castellammare, and on toward the steeping mass of Naples piled up the hills. The hot white road was uncrowded at this hour, and, in a city where the pedestrian is accustomed to save his skin against fiendish odds, they made a flying trip. A little breeze sprang up as they neared the old Castello, and when Berkeley brought the car to a stand before the Grande Hotel de Vésuve the streets had begun to live again.

Monsieur Bertolius was at home and begged the illustrious lady and gentlemen to ascend. The major-domo bowed them into the lift, and by a nimble bit of trotting was ready to meet them again at the second floor. He preceded them down a wide, cool corridor, knocked at a pair of high doors, and there took reluctant leave of them. Lady Alice stepped into the sala, the others following.

It was a huge room with the inevitable black-and-white chessboard floor, the usual long windows crowned with gold cornices and draped in red satin, the four immense gilt mirrors with their marble-topped consoles, the eight crimson-and-gold armchairs. Monsieur Bertolius appeared at the moment from another doorway fit to release a coach and six. He was a very spruce old Jewish gentleman, with a smooth-shaven pink face that looked like a disguise, white hair, and brows and lashes black. All over he was unnecessarily thick, from his nose and lips to his fingers' ends. But he moved with a touch of sprightliness and his eyes were sharp behind his pince-nez.

"Lady Howard? I have had the pleasure to see the Mountullibardine collection. Sir Spencer? And"—he referred with a gesture of apology to the cards he still held—"Signor della Diodare. By chance of Venice?"

"Of Rome," said the young man, with a courteous inclination.

"Will you be seated, madame? A very hot day, is it not? You will permit me to offer you a light wine cup?"

"Thanks! I should love it," said Lady Alice. She moved forward to one of the armchairs.

"And, Sir Spencer, will you sit here? I am honored."

"I fancy we are trespassing on your time," said Sir Spencer with his charming smile.

"Well, no; I am at leisure. Lady Howard has come, I feel sure, to ask

my advice?" His far from venerable face was all smiles.

"We came with Signor della Diodare; my husband suggested you."

"We were, to my distinction, mentioned in the same paragraph of notable arrivals," explained Sir Spencer with a little laugh. "Diodare, here, has a bit of family jewelry for your eye."

Bertolius shot a look of keen scrutiny at the young man. Alice Howard leaned a little forward in her chair, intently.

"Ah!" said Bertolius. It committed him to nothing.

Diodare put down his hat and stick, and approached the center table with an air of gentle resignation. He took his little rubbishy-looking package out, and deftly opened it. As the necklace tinkled down upon the table Alice Howard gave a little sigh. And truly the jewel could not be said to be unworthy this feminine tribute. It lay on the marble, lambent and luxurious. Bertolius rose and approached the table. He looked at them quickly each in turn, and picked up the heavy chain. After a moment, he took off his glasses and fitted a single magnifier into one eye. With the necklace in his hand, he walked over to the window.

Lady Alice had never taken her eyes from his face, but Diodare stood quite patiently, playing with the crumpled tissue paper under his hand. Sir Spencer merely waited. His young wife already possessed a famous treasure of jewels, but, if she wanted more, she, as well as he, was expansively solvent. She seemed to have set her heart upon the thing. The light wine cup, which had arrived and been served, occupied his thoughts at the moment to the exclusion of other matters.

There was quite a long pause. Bertolius went over the string, stone by stone, and then with it dangling in his hand stood frowning out the window. When finally he turned and came back toward the owner, he replaced his pince-

nez, and looked at the young man with a serious eye.

"It is my understanding that you wish to sell this, signore?" he asked gravely.

Diodare seemed to hesitate.

"I have explained to the illustrious lady," he said. He turned to her with his usual bow. "She will forgive my not having known her title."

"You do not wish to sell to me?"

"Pardon, signore. It is the first time I come, so to speak, face to face in a matter of this kind. I should without disrespect feel more comfortable in not disposing of it to a—*a dealer*." He looked boyishly confused. "The signore will understand that it would cause me humiliation, were it sold again, perhaps to a Roman family."

"Yes, I see that," said Bertolius slowly. "You are a stranger to me, Signor della Diodare, though I thought—I did think we had met in Venice. You must not take offense if I ask you if this necklace is your own."

"It is my own," replied Diodare stiffly. "My mother is quite old, and does not wear such things. It has been in our family for perhaps two hundred years, perhaps more."

"A pity," said Bertolius softly. He laid the necklace down on the table. Diodare touched it with a tentative finger, and looked at it in some embarrassment.

Sir Spencer had finished his light wine cup, and glanced at the young man. It was evident that he disliked to speak of its worth.

"What is the value of it, Monsieur Bertolius?" he asked, and smiled as Diodare shot him a grateful look.

"You have set no price on it?" asked Bertolius.

And Diodare repeated his disclaimer. "How could I? It has always been ours. I have no idea of its value."

"It is worth," said Bertolius slowly, "approximately one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Really?" gasped the young man:

"Whew!" whistled Sir Spencer thoughtfully.

"And how much is that?" asked Lady Alice.

Bertolius smiled at her.

"To-day, about thirty-one thousand five hundred pounds."

"Dear me," said she composedly. "I think I'll take it."

Sir Spencer rose.

"No thinking it over, Alice? It's a goodish sum."

"It is a fortune," said Diodare reverently.

"Well," said Alice Howard with the air of being the most reasonable of women, "I like it, and Monsieur Bertolius says it is worth that, you know. But, perhaps"—she turned to the young man—"perhaps you could sell it elsewhere for more?"

He made a quick, impulsive gesture of distaste.

"I thank you," he said. "It is vastly more than I ever dreamed—I never hoped——"

"Well, then, I'll take it." To the amazement of all three men, her ladyship opened a little trifle of a lace bag she carried, and produced a check book and a fountain pen.

"Really, my dear——" said Sir Spencer automatically.

Bertolius merely smiled.

"Lady Howard is right," he said. "I have given you only an appraisal, the value of merely these very fine stones. A collector would pay you more for it, on account of the setting which is peculiarly happy."

She looked like an absurd youngster playing a game, as she sat down at the table to write the check.

"You are quite sure you have so much at hand?" demurred Sir Spencer privately in her ear.

She laughed.

"Signor della Diodare can cash it this moment at Coutts'," she said.

"Of course," murmured the distressed vendor, "the illustrious lady's check is unquestionable."

"Well, it is rather," assented Sir Spencer with just a touch of sharp hauteur.

"To make assurance doubly sure," said Bertolius after a moment, lifting the necklace again, "I will agree to purchase this from Lady Howard tomorrow for another thousand pounds, and will make a profit on it myself the day after. And not, signore," he added brightly, "from a Roman family."

"I am afraid," said Diodare, "I have expressed myself very badly. It is such a personal matter to me."

"Of course, of course!" assented Bertolius, putting aside his apology. He wrapped the tissue paper again about the necklace and snapped its elastic band about it. "Who would think what you carry in your hand, Lady Howard? After all, it is cleverer than putting it into a steel box for any footpad to snatch." He handed her the little bunched-up package as he spoke. Diodare took the check, looking at it half dazed.

"I—I thank you," he said brokenly. As Sir Spencer moved toward the door with the air of a man who puts up with a woman's every whim, Bertolius at his elbow, Diodare lifted his humble look to the brisk blue eyes that met his on a level.

"Perhaps, you would permit me—as a great honor—perhaps you and Sir Spencer would dine with me to-night?"

"That's nice of you," she said frankly, "but we are engaged. However, you must come home with us to tea."

His eyes flashed gratefully.

"I am overwhelm," he said in English.

Bertolius was amiably refusing to be feed for his eminent opinion when the four came together at the double doors, but deftly enough Lady Alice managed to separate him from her husband as

they went down the long stone corridor, and leave him to congratulate young Diodare on his good fortune.

"Unmitigated cherub," said Lady Alice, drawing herself up at her husband's elbow to whisper into his ear, "just before we get into the motor will you please be taken faint, and occupy our young friend's attention?"

He had inclined his head to get her message, but he now drew up to eye her severely.

"I would remind you, Lady Howard, that I am on vacation," he said with some bitterness.

"Just a little weeny bit of play acting?" she pleaded. "I'll pay you two hundred pounds, for one performance."

"You are up to some dev'lish dark deed, my lady," he replied, continuing to look reproachfully at her ingenuous face. "I've been concerned in your unconscionable plots ere this, and I utterly refuse."

She pressed his arm gratefully.

"Unconditional seraph!" she murmured. "I will give you a lift of the brow." Before he could say more, she slipped her hand from his arm and came to a stand with the others. Sir Spencer gloomily observed her calm gayety, an expression totally at variance with his inner feeling. He quite sweepingly adored her in every mood, and not least when the imp of mischief took possession of her. He liked to see her eyes twinkle and her spirits lift with excitement, and it must be said that the mood was vastly becoming to her.

Bertolius, taking leave of them, seemed to think so, quite obviously enough to cause Sir Spencer to hold out his hand with a promptness that curtailed the holding of her slim fingers. The three stepped into the lift as Bertolius nodded and called his *au revoir* and adieux.

"My dear," said Alice solicitously, as they descended, "I am afraid you are not feeling well."

Sir Spencer shot her a grim look.

"It's nothing," he said with a tone of brave endurance. "Fairly warm, you know."

"The air will set you up," she said tenderly. She kept close beside him as they walked to the motor. And just before they reached the edge of the pavement, she raised her pretty black brows into her very hair.

The foremost actor of the English stage gave a faint gasp, and, seeming to falter in his step, swung his not inconsiderable weight toward Diodare, who instinctively closed in to support him. Lady Howard caught at him in the same moment.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "Berkeley, help Sir Spencer into the car. He is quite done up."

With a very little assistance he took his seat and she sat down beside him, all wifely attention. Diodare stood hesitating on the street.

"A thousand pities!" he said. "Perhaps some other time?" He faltered the suggestion timidly.

"No, no!" said Lady Alice. She swept her coat from the doorway. "You must come with us, of course. The air will be fresher as we ride."

Without further delay, he obeyed her, and Berkeley sent the car forward at a rush.

"Ah, that's better," said she as the movement brought a fluttering coolness into the car. "You feel better, my dear?"

Unseen by Diodare, he made her a frightful grimace.

"Quite fit, thanks," he said. "So sorry!"

They made the run back to Sorrento with little talk. Lady Alice occasionally patted her husband's arm. At such times he looked down at her, with a quizzical appreciation. He did not know why she was pleased, but he was very glad.

She took them both into her salon when they reached the hotel, and made

her husband comfortable in a cushioned seat near an open window. Diodare stood somewhat irresolutely about the room, till she gave him a moment's attention.

"You must not think of going," she insisted. "Sir Spencer would be most annoyed. Just let him rest a moment. I must speak to my maid about tea—we have guests coming." She laid down her lace bag, pulled off her hat like a boy, and ran her hand over her sleek coiffure. She was even prettier without the very pretty bonnet. "Excuse me, won't you?"

She moved away quickly and ran into the next room, where she spent the following thirty seconds standing on a chair just inside the portière. Then, with a chuckle, she stepped noiselessly down, waited a moment, and wandered back into the salon.

When her guests arrived—one elderly and two young smartly-frocked women with two attached males—she was already presiding over a tea table such as Sorrento seldom saw. To the Italian chefs she conceded much, but only an Englishwoman could cut bread to suit her—bread that would wave in the wind. There were little English biscuits and marmalade, cakes and crumpets, exotic little fritters of lobster paste that melted in the mouth, water cress and strawberries, and a crystal jug of luscious cream which Brigit, who was no less a personage than the Lady of Rath, declared the first she had seen since the Pré Catelan, and hung about lovingly, though demanding lemon in her tea because of her waistline. In the general rattle of greeting between old friends, Diodare seemed rather out of it, and more than willing to be gone, had he known just how to get away. But he was soon gathered in by the casual kindness of the duchess, and presented to her friends with the usurpation of privilege accorded a great lady.

"He's got a name like three quarters

gone on a church clock," she said cordially, and intoned: "Da-vi-do-del-la-di-oda-re! This is Frump, and this is Mugs. Alice, you should know that every one has not our sublime indifference to correct introductions. These two are Billy, and Bert. Bert is Wexford, you know. Young for it, ain't he?"

"I am aging rapidly," said Bert languidly, "in the train of a fatiguingly perpendicular woman." The Lady of Rath beamed at Diodare, taking it quite calmly that Bert should lift her bodily into an armchair, and went on: "So now you know us all, you see. Come hither, Yorick, and let me look at you. I hope you're well?"

"Brigit insists on calling me Yorick because she says it was my first part, but it's more like to be my last," said Sir Spencer. He was quite recovered, it would appear—a charming host with a friendly content in their society.

"Spencer is as well as could be expected, after a forced run into Naples," remarked Alice. "Let me show you what I've been buying." She crossed the room to where her little bag lay on a far-away table, and returned to toss the necklace into their midst, with a mere statement that Diodare had "found it" for her.

In the shrill cries of astonishment and enthusiasm, as it went wildly from hand to hand, the stranger, standing at his alien distance, shone in a reflected appreciation. But he was eager to be gone, that was evident, and, having declined tea, so soon as he graciously might, approached his pretty hostess to make his inevitable bow.

"You must come again," said Sir Spencer amiably as he rose, faintly surprised, as was his guest, to see the Lady Alice put forth her hand to Diodare.

"You are most kind," murmured the young man.

"When next we are in Rome," said Lady Howard smiling, "I shall go to the Sforza gallery to see the portrait of my

necklace." With her hand in Diodare's, she cried lightly over his shoulder: "Hey, my bonny crew, who's got my necklace?"

A disjointed chorus of disclaimers rose from a preoccupied group by the great sofa. Lady Alice continued to smile.

"Well, where is it, children?"

"Oh, heavens, Alice, how like you not to know!" cried Brigit, getting to her feet. "Look around, Billy. Here, Bert, move those cushions. Who had it last?"

"As if we knew!" laughed Frump. "I gave it to Mugs, on my right—or rather she snatched it—here on the sofa."

"Positively!" said Mugs. "And Bert took it from my nerveless grasp. It's far too magnificent for one person to hold."

Frump had thrust her hand into the back of the sofa to the very bottom and felt along its entire length. She rose, suddenly sobered.

"But where is it?" she faltered. "It's gone!"

"Nonsense!" said Lady Alice.

"Oh, but it can't be gone, you know," said Sir Spencer soothingly, ambling forward.

Bert and Billy were on their knees under the couch.

"It's not on the floor—I can see clear across the room," they called up through the short valance, emerging much ruffled as to hair.

The entire group on its feet looked blankly around the room, in which, despite the added adornments of Lady Howard's belongings, there was no reasonable place near them where so large an object could lie perdu. Diodare himself seemed stunned.

"My heavens!" breathed Bert. He turned a perfectly expressionless face on his host. "I took it from Mugs, and what did I do with it?" Idiotically he began plunging his hands into his pockets, till he suddenly became lighted as

with an inner flame. "I got up to get the cakes, and I put it here!" He dropped his hand to the edge of a little table near him, stared resentfully at the one empty cup it carried, and then swept his friends with another baffled glance.

"But let us see, Wexford!" said Sir Spencer idly. "I was on the other side of this table—not very near it, to be sure. But the only one on my side. You must be mistaken. And here is Alice's table, with"—he paused to look it over—"nothing but the tea things. You see, if it had been left on this table, I should have been the only one to pick it up, whereas I have never had the thing in my hand. Think again!"

Lady Alice had never lost her polite composure.

"I don't see why any one should get agitated," she said, looking at Brigit, who was flying about looking at every conceivable and inconceivable nook and cranny. "It must be here, you know."

"Well, but dash it," said Brigit largely, "it simply isn't!" She stood a moment utterly motionless, and then came back to them, brushing past the speechless Diodare who seemed turned to stone. "I tell you what it is, Alice; I shall not leave this room until I've been searched to the skin."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Alice fondly.

"If you won't have your maid help me, in the next room, I swear I'll strip right here!" threatened the downright Lady of Rath, tossing off her scarf. "In a hard, smooth, marble box, like these Italian rooms, a pin couldn't hide itself, you know."

"But my dear girl!" laughed Sir Spencer.

"No!" she said, almost with a stamp of her foot. "No, for my own peace of mind. Come on, Frump. Come on, Mugs. Alice, you come with us. Your maid will think us balmy unless you are with us." She swept them toward the door of the next room. "Besides," she

added sagely, "the minute we go to all the trouble of undressing—though goodness knows I've only got on a frock and a shimmy slip—the thing will be satisfied and turn up. Inanimate things do love a rumpus. I suppose they get bored just sticking around—" She fairly talked herself into the adjoining room.

The men were left uncomfortably staring at one another. Sir Spencer ran his hands through his thick hair with a bewildered air.

"I say, you chaps!" he said helplessly.

"It's all quite unnecessary," said Billy, who had never ceased to roam around, tossing up the cushions and overturning books. "Especially if those women wear as little as the duchess so frankly describes. A big, lumpy thing like that could easily be felt through any amount of clothes." He came to a stand before his host and spread his arms wide. "Begin on me, old man, but be merciful! I'm cruel ticklish!"

"But it's outrageous!" laughed Sir Spencer.

Diodare came to life at last. He was very pale, but his eyes were blazing.

"Sir Spencer!" he said, and moistened his dry lips. "I am the only stranger in your rooms," he went on in rapid Italian. "But I am a man of honor. To you English this may be a joke. To me, it seems an insult. You yourself have seen me give the necklace to her ladyship, in presence of Monsieur Bertolius. I am not to blame if she mislays it. But to be searched—I utterly refuse!"

Wexford's monocle fell out expressively as he faced the speaker, whose meaning reached him mainly through the tone of excited protest.

"My holy aunt!" he said softly, and turned toward the others with a dreadful question in his face.

"You can all have seen that I have not been in the part of the room where you examined the necklace!" impressively declared Diodare more slowly. "I

have been over here—you see!" His animated gestures explained the distance at which he had been from the missing jewel.

A petrified silence among his hearers was broken by Sir Spencer's saying in a tone of lenient forgiveness:

"That's true, of course."

"Why, how does he know that?" asked Billy, whose arms had fallen as his attention was diverted to this extraordinary outburst. "One jogs around without thinking, you know—what?"

"But I am sure!" cried Diodare angrily. "I stayed over here."

"I say," growled Bert with some distaste.

"Look here," said Billy, "your wild imagination doesn't lead you to think we are hunting ourselves over because we think we took the thing on purpose?" He turned away scowling, to take off his coat and shake it.

"It is to my point of view an insult," repeated Diodare feverishly, "which I am sure—I say I am sure Sir Spencer is incapable of offering a stranger and a guest." He bowed, not quite so collectedly as usual, and took a backward step. "I excuse myself," he said in English.

Sir Spencer moved to his side in a swift, easy motion.

"Of course," he said with a friendly hand upon the man's arm, "we know you haven't got it. But you see, with all the ladies being turned inside out, you know—it doesn't leave us any choice, my dear fellow, does it now?"

But Diodare made a quick motion to throw off his touch, and became aware that the friendly fingers had stiffened into a manacle of steel, without any visible change. He gave one appalled look upward at the face whose expression had not altered from its pleasant cordiality. The amiable smile, however, had very slightly hardened. Diodare went suddenly limp, and a whiteness came into his face.

At this moment Lady Alice returned alone, crossing the room swiftly to her husband's side.

"It's all right, Spencer," she said softly, and very deftly took a small tissue-paper packet from Diodare's pocket.

"Ah," said Sir Spencer quietly. He caught a chair nearer to his guest with his foot and let him drop upon it. Without farther comment, he flicked a handkerchief from his coat, and lightly passed it through his hands. As Lady Alice stripped off the rubber band from the little parcel, Diodare leaned back and closed his eyes. Behind the Howards, Billy and Bert were staring at each other in open-mouthed stupefaction.

"I'm sorry, signore," their hostess said in a low voice. "I meant it as a warning to you. You are rather a novice at this sort of thing, I fancy. Don't try it on again. Good-by."

Diodare gathered himself up in one last effort of self-exculpation.

"I tell you, signora, I can explain—if you will examine—"

She cut him short by tearing the packet open and letting the green-and-gold chain hang down before his eyes.

"If you would examine—" she retorted curtly.

This was inexplicable to the others, but in the pause they could hear Diodare's gasp for breath.

"You see," said Lady Alice, "I know all about it. I have your address on your card, and will mail you what you refer to." She turned to pass the necklace to her husband, then looked back. "You will find," she said, "no difficulty in cashing my check."

With a sob, Diodare swayed to his feet.

"Signora!" he mumbled. "Signori!" Too crushed to bow, too glad to get off so easily to delay, he wavered to the door and disappeared.

"Well!" said Billy elaborately.

Bert collapsed upon the sofa.

"God save us!" said he. "I'm a sick

man. Old chap, if we could have just a spot of brandy?"

But his host was for the moment inattentive to his needs. He lifted his look from the necklace he held, to his wife's face.

"My darling child," he said, as the rehabeted Lady of Rath and her friends came eagerly in, half laughing. They saw the jewels in Sir Spencer's hand and cried out once. In the silence that followed, as Billy helped the flagging Bert to his feet, Sir Spencer asked incredulously: "Do you know what this is?"

Lady Alice nodded, biting her lip.

"It's imitation," she said brokenly, and went suddenly into his arms. Sir Spencer dropped the gaud incontinently, to close both arms around her as she put her head into his shoulder. "I shouldn't have done it," she sobbed. "It was awfully exciting. But it hurts me so! He—he looked so nice!"

Her friends exchanged glances of sympathetic amusement over her bowed head. Sir Spencer spoke softly to her and occupied himself in drying her eyes.

"It's all very novel and all that," said Billy sweetly, "but, as a man of the world, I should like to know about the check."

"Oh, Alice, how like you!" screamed Brigit. "You've let him get away."

Lady Howard shuddered.

"I didn't want him around," she explained.

"That's a ripping good reason," said Sir Spencer, "but—did you quite mean to let him go with thirty-one thousand pounds?"

"Billy," said Bert, "I'm afraid I'm going again." He tottered to a chair and closed his eyes as he fell back.

Sir Spencer suddenly bent and recovered the necklace.

"No, but about Bertolius?"

Bert opened his eyes promptly.

"Well, *what* about Bertolius?" he asked. The others had gathered round

in speechless interest. "Duchess, you'll pardon my weakness." He got again to his feet and turned on his host. "This thing gets thicker the more you stir it. Who is Bertolius? It's not by any chance a nickname for me, is it? Heaven knows I am an innocent bystander."

"If it's the Bertolius I know," said Brigit, "he's the greatest man on jewels bar none living and few dead."

"Yes, yes," said Billy. "It's all very novel, as I said before, but the man may be cashing the check at this very moment, or words to that effect, don't you know, what?"

"Sit down," said Lady Alice, once more able to smile. She finished mopping her eyes with an appearance of leisure. "It's all right about the check, Billy. I'll explain."

"Thirty-one thousand pounds take a lot of explaining," mused Bert. "Brigit, I wish you'd let me hold your hand."

"If you'll postpone it just a moment, Alice," said their host as she sat down again at her tea table, "I'll just order some brandy and soda. Wexford is not the only one who will be glad of a little jolt."

"I was about to beg another cup of tea," said Brigit, "but I'll wait for something more reviving."

Alice Howard sat waiting till her guests were well fortified against surprise. At her husband's "Now, my dear!" she looked at him and smiled.

"Well, to begin at the beginning," she said, "I am no fool about precious stones myself."

"My darling," said Brigit, "you would be a fool if you were—you, a Mountul-libardine!"

"So you see, I knew the moment I carefully examined the thing that it was imitation. It's very marvelous, though; the emeralds are flawed to perfection."

"It's a bull I might have made myself," said the Lady of Rath approvingly.

Sir Spencer crossed his knees and

sipped at his glass. His eyes were upon his pretty wife, and in their depths was a supreme confidence in her having come through this adventure without scathe. She was a mischievous besom, but whoso thought to get the better of her was a vainglorious fool.

"Naturally, I did not blurt it right out at him. He looked so nice I was half hoping he didn't know himself that they were false."

"What's this?" cried Frump, sitting erect.

"Oh, silly, don't you see?" nudged Mugs.

"She thought his ancestors had entered a ringer against him," said Billy nodding. "What a sickener that would have been for Davido!"

"Well, so when he said he had no idea what it was worth, and was all for a judge and jury of jewelers——"

"Alliterative, ain't she?" murmured Brigit.

"I decided on the spot to go in. At first I was afraid he'd be bowled by the news, but then dark suspicions got the upper hand."

"It's rather mixed, that," said Billy, "but I get your ghastly drift."

"So Spencer and I went in and he asked us to choose our man. I was all for the curator of the museum till Spencer said Bertolius was at the Vésuve, so we cockled over there. And long before Bertolius said a word, I knew what I knew."

"Don't hold out on us!" begged Wexford.

"I knew there were two necklaces," said Alice quietly, and poured herself a cup of tea.

Sir Spencer cocked his eye at her.

"You could tell that at a distance? I remember you sat away from the table."

"Two necklaces!" all the others were repeating to one another.

Lady Alice looked at her husband and laughed.

"Get up, Spencer, and show us how he brought out the necklace to show me."

Sir Spencer rose and put down his glass. His face was thoughtful. He caught up Bert's hat and stick, and with them confusedly bunched in his left hand, stood with an air of engaging diffidence pulling nothing out of his pocket with the other hand. His eyes had become of a melting trustfulness.

"My holy aunt!" said Bert laughing. "It's the chap to the life."

Alice Howard's eyes had brightened. "Now what did he do at Bertolius' rooms?"

Her husband went toward the door, turned, laid down the hat and stick modestly, and approached the center table with an air of gentle resignation. He put his left hand to his pocket.

"The photographic eye," said Lady Alice. "It was as plain as it is now to you. He had the real emeralds on the other side."

"But do you mean to say, Howard," said Bert in an awe-struck tone, "that you can live with a woman like this?"

"Well, it's done by having no false jewels," sighed Brigit affectionately.

Sir Spencer thanked her with a little smile.

"I don't see, Alice, why he did not show you the real one."

"Well, not one person in ten thousand would have known the difference, if I do say it. He knew well what the thing was worth, and, showing it to a lot of people, I suppose he took no risks."

"Then I come into the story," said Sir Spencer. "Though why this abandoned woman made me feign faintness, only she and her Maker know."

"It was very simple. Under Bertolius' nose, I bought the real jewels and held them fast. I knew Diodare would make an opportunity to swap the packets—indeed he immediately asked us to dine to make sure our acquaintance did not end there. It might have taken him some time, but in the end he meant

to leave me in happy possession of the copy. You see, after Bertolius had passed on them, I might never have found it out. He could not know I was by way of being a connoisseur."

"It's all very novel," began Billy, when Brigit came more promptly to the point.

"But what was the sham faint for?"

"I simply changed the packages myself while Spencer lay up against him."

Everybody shrieked.

"You mean to say you let him rave around with the real thirty thousand pound necklace?" cried the duchess.

"Why not?" demanded Alice. "He was coming here to tea with us."

"And I declare to you she looks like a gentle child!" said Bert. "Why, a more steel-nerved gambler I never saw arrested."

"Then I watched him here," went on Alice Howard. "I went into my bedroom and watched him over the top of the curtain. He changed the packages."

"I begin," said Bert solemnly, "to sympathize with the poor devil."

"He gave you back the real one," breathed Brigit with satisfaction.

"And all the time," said Billy, "she sat there as calm as a cold pasty, knowing we were in for a crash like that!"

"I hope my teas are never too dull," said Lady Alice. "Bertolius offered me a raise of a thousand pounds if I would sell to him to-morrow, and so I shall, as I owe Spencer two hundred for a very beautiful fainting fit out of season. It's too gaudy for the likes of me, anyhow." She pointed at the necklace in Brigit's hand with the tongs and helped herself to sugar. "And that goes back to a badly frightened swindler by post."

"But good gad!" said Bert, sitting up suddenly. "Where's the real one you showed us?"

"Just where it's been all the time since you laid it down to get the cakes," said Alice Howard, and thrust the tongs into the crystal jug of cream. The emeralds came up winking, full of milky drops.



The Amateur Child

By Valma Clark

Author of "The Middle of the Tale,"
"Red Gods," etc.



WHY, Kelly!" cried Northam Griggs, Jr. "I thought you were in Paris toiling at being a reporter. How——"

"Luck! I've been looking for you. I'm in Menton toiling at being a reporter, and you can help me, Nort. Café au lait—another for you—two, waiter." The huge Irishman jackknifed onto a little iron chair, squeezed his knees under the Alice-blue table, and glanced appreciatively at the Promenade, with its fashionable strollers, in a white morning sunlight; at the blue Mediterranean beyond.

"Suits me. Paris is a gray drizzle. I'm down on these big jewel robberies. What do you know?"

"Know?" Griggs laughed. "I know what every one knows—that the ingenious gentleman has progressed, consistently and methodically, from Cannes, through Nice and Monte Carlo, and that he has now arrived at Menton. I know that every one in Menton has locked up everything she owns—except Aunt Harriet. I know——"

"Your aunt is not too cordial to me, Nort; I called at the villa first, and, while she didn't exactly give me the air——"

"She made a microscopic examination of you through her lorgnette?" grinned the other. "She never approved of you,

Kelly; of your cognomen or your calling. That's Aunt Harriet. It's Aunt Harriet, too, to insist that she's going to wear her star sapphire at the musicale she's giving Friday evening, a week from to-day, and to advertise it."

"The notorious sapphire?"

"Yes; the famous ex-idol's-eye. Fairly flinging down the gauntlet at the visiting thief. But, to conclude: I know the sentiments, personally, of one or two of the fair victims."

"You're acquainted? But you would be. I was counting on that. Who?"

"Lady Wemyss."

"Monte Carlo—safe—pearls," supplied Kelly. "Safe was opened, and the genuine string was replaced by a very good string of imitation. No clumsiness, no clues. The theft went undiscovered——"

"For several days," nodded Griggs. "A slight awkwardness in the clasp, which she had never before noticed, annoyed Lady Wemyss as she was fastening the pearls about her neck. She took them in to a jeweler, who enlightened her. Also Mrs. Beckley Lewisohn."

"American, at Nice. Entered the lady's room by night, and helped himself to trifles valued at two hundred thousand."

"Yes! He crawled into the room by

a ledge along the outside of the hotel which measures no more than ten centimeters in width, thereby proving himself an acrobat. Whoever he is, he's a versatile fellow, Kelly."

"No limit to his variety. Sure, he must be a gentleman, to all appearances, as well as an acrobat and a safe manipulator, or he could never have pulled the daring social trick he has. It's the variety of him that makes him good copy."

"As well as darned hard to catch," nodded Griggs.

"Hm! Take this Hoyt affair—his first Menton offense——"

"Claire Hoyt."

* "But you don't happen to know her, too? You weren't among those present at the Hôtel d'Angleterre night before last when——"

"I do, and I was, Kelly, old fellow."

"Well, I *am* in luck. Here I am at headquarters, and all I've got to do is to sit back and let you introduce me around and wait. If Nice and Monte Carlo are precedents, then the Hoyt theft is the mere preface to Mr. Raffles' Menton chapter."

"Brilliant argument, Kelly. The detectives reason even as do you; they're camping out all over the town; sharp-eyed Frenchmen."

"I may even have the supreme luck to be present—a first-hand witness—at the next——"

"If Aunt Harriet persists in playing the mule, and, if she can be induced to include you, Kelly, in her Friday-night affair, I haven't a doubt you will have that luck. But, meantime, why not meet Claire and Mrs. Lewisohn and Lady Wemyss? Claire—Mrs. Hoyt—just happens to be having a small dinner party to-night—a sort of mourners' wake, you understand, in which the robbed ones get together and sympathize with each other."

"You could manage an invitation for me?"

"Well, Claire is—democratic," grinned the other. "We'll put it up to her, eh? Every one in Menton passes on the Promenade at this hour; the fact is, Kelly, I'm rather expecting that—er—Mrs. Hoyt may pass."

"So? And this is your lookout, then? Widow, did you say?"

"Hm! Ah, here she comes now."

A tinkling of little carriage bells, a great honking of the ridiculous little carriage horn. Griggs, followed by Charlie Kelly, stepped out to the curb to waylay a young woman, who was dressed in black and was very lovely, in a modish way, against the white, linen-covered seat of her carriage. Now, this is the curious love story of Northam Griggs, but just for the moment the reactions of Kelly, an unprejudiced stranger, may be worth recording. He gathered an impression of black-haired, white-skinned beauty, of vivaciousness, and of fingers—especially fingers—long and slim, deft in their braiding of a tassel on her hand bag as she talked.

"But certainly, Northam, you must bring Mr. Kelly along. I was short one man, and Mr. Kelly is—convenient," she laughed. "Reporter? Oh, now that's too bad; I'm really the least bit weary of reporters. If you'll promise not to report *me*. Mr. Kelly—— What's that, Nort? Gay, because I'm not howling? But what use to go on howling?"

"My point," said Griggs, "is that you are a good sport, you know, Claire. Not many women could take the loss of a diamond bracelet as you do. But won't you join us in drinks?"

"Ah, no, I'm very busy. I am on to the florist's and to the stores——"

"To market, to market?"

"And then to the shops to buy Patsy-child a new dress, if she's very good. My little girl, Mr. Kelly." Mrs. Hoyt leaned back, and it was only then that Kelly became definitely conscious of the child on the seat beyond her. She

was a thin, pale girl of perhaps twelve or thirteen, and she wore the sort of matched costume of a most delicate buff color that little French girls wear, and her face, beneath the quaint little hat, was framed in corn-silk hair clipped in a Dutch bob and was most fragile and listless in its expression. "Patsy-child" looked too indifferent to be anything but "good."

"Did you get my mandarins, Pat, and did you find them—edible?" Griggs' sober deference was in direct contrast to the mother's playful, grown-up manner, and the child responded to it with a flush of pleasure.

"Thank you, yes, Mr. Griggs. They tasted like—like flowers smell. I——"

But Mrs. Hoyt leaned forward again:

"Oh, René, I've been looking for you!" she hailed.

"Mr. Jobin, Mr. Kelly," she introduced a slim young Frenchman, in purple necktie and cream spats. "Clamber in, René, my dear. Au revoir, then, until we meet again this evening."

Again there was the tinkle of the carriage bells. Kelly caught a last glimpse of corn-silk hair and a pale face beside the sleek dark hair and the vivacious face of the mother, who had turned to wave and smile at an acquaintance. Light laughter, wash of the sea, gurgle of a guitar from the garden of the neighboring hotel where a wandering troubadour played under balconies for coins. That little girl was the only sober, unplayful thing on the landscape; she looked, Kelly thought, like a little tragedy.

"Curious child," he said, as they strolled back to his hotel.

"Yes. She's difficult—old for her years; rather appealing, though."

"The Frenchman is—what relation?"

"None," scowled Griggs quickly. "He's a friend; goes everywhere with Claire; motors to Nice and Monte Carlo with her; she's hardly ever seen without him."

"Scandal?"

"No, Kelly. You've got the mind of a reporter, too, haven't you? Mrs. Hoyt's position here is unimpeachable. Jobin may be in love with Claire, though I rather think he's using her for—well, for a social leverage, perhaps. But Claire is certainly not in love with him. She's in love with the memory of her husband, if you will know. A New York broker—he's been dead for years, but she still wears mourning for him."

"Huh! The forlorn and lonely widow, eh? Her weeds are a bit dashing, Nort, and her manner is—not uncheerful."

"Bravado. She's gay to the eye—stops up all the little chinks of her loneliness with social flittings and crazy indulgences of Pat. She's fearfully fond of the child, while Pat is peculiarly unresponsive. The doting mother! Even her enemies would credit her with that virtue. But she has her low days, Kelly; I know because——"

"She's told you so!"

"Eh? Yes."

Kelly grinned at him, and Griggs met the grin with resentment. They were both tall, dark young men, but Kelly was a loosely hung, rather slovenly fellow, with wise eyes in an ugly face, whereas Griggs was slim, well-groomed, and boyishly handsome.

"Sure, sympathy is a great thing, Nort. I've always been interested in your philanthropies. Original philanthropies. Nothing so obvious and—er—adequate as the mere signing of a check ever did satisfy your benevolent conscience, did it? Let's see, there was the impractical Russian countess who started a tea room and charged too little for a cup of tea and failed; you hauled her out of bankruptcy by morning lessons in economics and overhead expenses. There was the little English old maid who had nothing at all, and gave you half of it; she needed to share, was the way you diagnosed her, and you made her perfectly happy by accepting

crocheted doilies from her. I've always wondered, Nort, just what would happen if you became philanthropically interested in a lovely lady. Lovely and unhappy. My curiosity is about to be satisfied. Nothing short of marriage, I suppose——"

"Don't be an ass," snapped Griggs.

It was in the course of Mrs. Hoyt's dinner that evening that the thought first occurred to Northam Griggs that Jobin might know something of these mysterious jewel robberies. Griggs had never trusted the fellow. Just what it was in Jobin's bearing that riveted his attention now, Griggs could not have said definitely—a quick lowering of the eyes, an infinitesimal nervous movement of the shoulders——

They were six: Lady Wemyss, Mrs. Lewisohn, Claire Hoyt, Kelly, Jobin, Griggs; and naturally the conversation had turned chiefly on the robberies.

"Yes, every decent piece I owned," said Mrs. Lewisohn. "I couldn't bear the sight of that Nice hotel afterward, so I moved over here to the Winter Palace. Just in time for Claire's chapter. But then, if you've nothing left to lose, yourself, there's some satisfaction in seeing your friends plundered."

"Frankly," drawled Lady Wemyss, "I'd begun to suspect Claire. It was too curious that she should be present, flaunting diamonds, at every social function in both Nice and Monte Carlo where a robbery occurred, and should go untouched. I'd begun to suspect her of charming the thief. Of course, since she's joined our ranks——"

"If you're going to suspect me," laughed Claire at random, "then you'll have to suspect René, too. You didn't miss a robbery, either, did you, René?"

"But that I should have charmed zee thief," fenced the Frenchman lightly, "she would have had to be a lady."

There was a small silence. Mrs. Hoyt's villa was hung high on a terrace

at the top of the Old Town, and the dining-room curtains of soft, old, Italian-yellow silk framed a twilight view of the Bay of Garavan, still faintly rosed from the sun's last reflection, and set in a crescent of shore lights. The candlelight flickered over the polished table, laid with bits of old altar lace, and picked out jewel spots of amber glass, wines, fruit. Griggs was especially preoccupied with the crystal drops which shimmered on the bosom of Mrs. Hoyt's low, black evening dress, with the petal-white skin of the throat, and of the lovely face above.

"Tell me," said Kelly, "how he happened to make away with your bracelet, Mrs. Hoyt."

"That," she laughed, "I don't know. It was at the dinner dance at the Hôtel d'Angleterre—a benefit affair. I danced with every one. The floor was jammed. I went into the dressing room for a moment, and there I missed my bracelet. I gave the alarm; the police were called in. There was a thorough search of every one and everything. Oh, most spectacular, in the French manner, you know. Nothing came of it."

"But you've no impression of the man who——"

"No. It might have been one of my partners; it might have been a stranger who crowded against me in the jam. That's characteristic of all these robberies, you know; no one has ever gathered the faintest impression of the thief—not the tiniest clew of him."

"It's that phase of it," murmured Lady Wemyss, "which makes one almost certain that the thief is some one who moves in our own circle. That's the beastly part of it—one suspects one's very friends."

"But how," shivered Mrs. Lewisohn, "would the fellow ever dare? Why, if I were wanted on a dozen scores by an army of these nasty little French police—pardon, Monsieur Jobin; I'm fond of everything French except

French police—I'd simply go and hide myself and——"

"Then you'd be an utter fool, Jane," laughed Mrs. Hoyt. "There's only one way to escape the police, if you're guilty, and that's to face the police. Do you know what I'd do if I had committed these robberies and were wanted? I'd settle, and I'd build up such a solid brick wall of prestige and respectability around me as no mere policeman could ever topple!" Mrs. Hoyt's laugh was daring; two spots of color burned through the delicate rouge on her cheeks.

"Really, Claire," chuckled Griggs, "I think you'd enjoy the rôle of Lady Raffles!"

But it was at this instant that he turned and caught the Frenchman scowling darkly at his unconscious hostess; Jobin's eyes dropped beneath Griggs' cold stare; there was that little nervous movement of his shoulder. Then he threw himself, too energetically, into speculations about the thief Griggs watched the man after that.

They drifted through the living room—a flowery place of a blossoming Japanese wall paper, chintz-covered chairs, and vases of every kind filled with all the flowers of southern France—the feathery, fragrant, yellow mimosa, the little cool, purple violets, pinks, roses.

Jobin paused for a moment and fingered a small, blue-enameled jar on the mantelpiece. When Mrs. Lewisohn reached for it curiously, he stopped her.

"Mustn't!" smiled Mrs. Hoyt. "It's René's silliness. He gave it to me on my birthday, and I'm not to touch it—no one is to touch it. There's some sort of a good-luck charm about it that's broken with handling."

"Interestin'," drawled Lady Wemyss. "What did you say it was?"

"Only a little rose jar; it's filled with petals, and the scent comes out through these perforations, you see. Stuffy here. Shall we go into the garden for coffee?"

"Stay," breathed Mrs. Hoyt several hours later, as the other guests took their departure; "please do, Northam." So Griggs stayed on in the little graveled terrace garden, with its two orange trees, and its balustrade with the two pale-blue jardinières and the rioting vine of trumpet flowers, and watched a full moon rise over Bordighera, silver the Mediterranean below, and outline, palely, the gray humps of the Alps above.

"Bad day. Fearfully—low day," murmured Mrs. Hoyt, over a long silence; and Griggs knew, from her voice, from the droop of head against her chair, that her eyes were closed against the pain of old memories. "My—wedding anniversary, Nort. It was on a night like this, a hundred years ago—— You didn't know you were—helping me celebrate my wedding anniversary, did you? Tired!" She put out her hand like a child for a cigarette.

Griggs stood restlessly above her.

"That Jobin, Claire—I wish you wouldn't—— I wish you'd take on me, instead of Jobin."

"René? What have you against poor René?"

"Nothing, only—— Claire, you need to be taken care of. If he should be a— a bounder——"

"René fills up time."

"Couldn't I fill up time?"

"You are a dear, Northam." She tossed away the cigarette, put out her hand to him, drew him down to the arm of her chair. "A dear," she breathed, her eyes still shut; "the only one who—understands."

Griggs held her hand closer; he bent to the shut eyes, to the tilted mouth.

"Pardon me," said a clear voice. He raised himself. He stared at a tall young person in a long robe who stood framed in the open French window. She advanced to the terrace, and her face, in the moonlight, was the most lovely thing that Griggs had ever seen,

like a pale Rossetti lady, a creature out of a fairy tale. But, of course, it was only little Patsy Hoyt! But she was so tall in that long negligee over her night clothes. Griggs had not realized that the child was so tall.

"What do you mean? How dare you?" It took Griggs a second to realize that that sharp voice was Claire Hoyt's.

"I've come for Mary-Rose; I forgot Mary-Rose; I can't sleep without Mary-Rose." It seemed to Griggs that this strange child was delicately mocking her mother.

"Your doll? You—you——"

"She's in the bluest jardinière. I'm afraid I can't quite reach her."

"I thought you detested dolls," smiled Griggs, extracting a bizarre, Parisian beauty of bisque and silks from the jardinière.

"But sometimes," said Patsy, "they're useful. When you can't sleep."

"Oh, quite," he grinned.

"Come here; come here and kiss me good night," laughed Patsy's mother, in her normal, indulgent tone. "You're a naughty little girl, Patsy Hoyt. You know I've forbidden you to come out here like that; you know you are impossibly susceptible to colds." Did Patsy wince from her mother's caress? Griggs imagined it. "Now run—run along and get Ninon to tuck you in tight."

But the spell was broken. The town clock struck one and Griggs apologized, gently but absently, to his hostess for wearing her out. He swung down to the Quai Bonaparte by the dark and narrow ways of the Old Town; and, curiously, it was Patsy's moon-blanced little face which floated pleasurably in his memory, not the mother's.

It was on the following afternoon in the Casino, at teatime, that Griggs, doing the honors with Kelly, ran into Claire and the child again. Claire stood in the gaming room, by the nearest

table, merely looking on. She never played for small stakes, and she scorned the little casinos, traveling always to Monte Carlo when she was in gambling mood.

"Hello," she hailed them. "Patsy? Oh, I had to bring her. It was Ninon's afternoon off. Stupid for her." She smiled at the child who stood passively beside her and watched, with a sort of patience, the spinning of the roulette wheel. "But she likes the pastries."

Mrs. Hoyt laid an affectionate arm about Patsy's shoulders. A certain sharp-tongued Mrs. Winton passed at the moment, and smiled in a quite friendly fashion for her, and murmured something at Claire concerning "doting mothers." Patsy herself stood without stirring, her little face hard.

Mrs. Hoyt turned back to the table. She was watching the self-conscious, inexperienced play of a coarse-looking, middle-aged woman who sat directly in front of her and flashed diamonds on every plump finger.

"A newcomer, and an American," Griggs fixed her. She must be very new to Menton, ignorant of the robberies, else she would not have decked herself out in this conspicuous fashion. Of course, they might be paste. But they were not paste. No, financially speaking, the woman was the real thing; the croupier rattled his box for tips in a significant fashion, and she dropped into it a bill of convincing size. Money—genuine stones——

He happened to glance up and saw René Jobin, on the opposite side of the table, also regarding the bill and the diamonds.

"It's yours," said Mrs. Hoyt sweetly to the impossible woman. "Five. You have to watch them, or they'll rake in your winnings and pass you by." And she dropped down into the vacant chair beside the person, and guided her play, and chatted with her graciously.

Griggs turned to Patsy. He ragged

her about Mary-Rose, and about the wisp of a colored handkerchief at her wrist. He tried to make her smile. Some quality of pathos in her listlessness, her unchildlike gravity, stabbed Griggs. Hang it all, Patsy's little square hands had more character than the merely deft hands of her mother.

"I'll bet," he challenged, his muscles and his mood responding to the lively jazz, "that you can't dance!"

"I'll bet," said Patsy, "that I can."

"Come on," said Griggs. "Bar of nougat to a meringue."

He glanced back to see Mrs. Hoyt rise and drift carelessly over to Jobin, and to see Kelly drop into the vacant place she left. He guided Patsy through the crowd, between tables, to the clear space, took her in his arms. She was light and rather wistful—a long-legged, fair little girl, in palest lavender, moving seriously with him at a party of rollicking grown-ups.

"Laugh, darn you!" said Griggs.

Patsy lifted two clear blue eyes between the corn-silk flaps of her Dutch bob; a delicious, sudden color tinted her face, her throat; she laughed.

Young Griggs himself laughed, for pure joy. Dancing, they laughed together. He was absurdly, unaccountably thrilled. Deuce take it, a kid—a mere youngster! Yet she danced like a little débutante, following each tricky little step, giving herself up to the music, to his arms.

He became conscious of Patsy's mother looking on, without approval.

"I set out, Claire," he laughed tactfully, "to give your infant a lesson, but she ended by giving *me* points. Patsy can dance."

"Yes. Mr. Kelly's just managed a table. Shall we have tea?"

"Starved." But Griggs forgot tea. He was less interested in Claire's quick, white fingers moving among the tea things than in Patsy's delicate nibbling of an éclair.

The lights went out, and two "Dancing Dolls" did a vaudeville turn upon the small stage.

"The blond one is too stout, but the little brunette really does look like a young girl," commented Griggs.

"She's thin," said Patsy critically, "but the bones are old bones; you always can tell by the bones."

"Eh?" The child's precocious wisdom startled him.

The lights flashed back on, and Griggs wanted to dance with Patsy again; he turned to her, but Mrs. Hoyt cut in: "Ours, Nort? Sweet of you to—ask me," she teased.

"I was going to—to ask you."

"Just one more éclair. Patsy, dear," she warned.

"I don't want any more éclairs," said the child clearly.

"Sulky!" giggled Mrs. Hoyt into Griggs' shoulder. "You've made a conquest, Nort! My little girl—"

Griggs did not rise to it. Dancing with Claire, he was just discovering, was not so pleasant as dancing with Claire's young daughter.

They climbed up to the Villa Berthe—he and Kelly—again that evening, on a casual invitation from Claire. They were early, and just short of Claire's high-walled garden they had stood for a few moments to look back at the crooked, red-tiled roofs of the Old Town, fading into twilight, and to listen to the running patter and guttural shrieks of children playing some native version of hide-and-seek down those echoing stone passages.

From the garden behind them came voices—Mrs. Hoyt's and Patsy's:

"But I can't have you running about the town alone like that! What would people say? I've told you—I've told Ninon—"

"I can read! I guess I can *read*, can't I? I only went down for that Hewlett book in the Tauchnitz edition."

"But Ninon—"

"I'm sick of Ninon! I'm sick of everything. I——"

"Oh, heavens, Pat, haven't I told you—haven't I explained to you reasonably——"

"Reasonably? *Reasonably!* You'll drive me t-too far one of these——"

"Cry, then—cry if you must! Only, for the love of pink plaster saints, hush up now. It's Pierre coming."

"You wanted something, madame?"

"A cigarette. Thanks, Pierre."

The eyes of Griggs interrogated the eyes of Kelly. They pressed the bell on Mrs. Hoyt's gate; entered.

Patricia Hoyt stood, in the little crumpled lavender frock that seemed too small to clothe her rage, and fairly glared at her mother. Mrs. Hoyt looked past the glare to them.

"Discipline," she laughed lightly; "you catch me in the act. Go in to Ninon, Patsy! This minute, please!"

Patsy's face was white; her blue eyes were blinded with tears. She turned, rushed, stumbling, past Griggs, vanished into the house.

Griggs stooped, picked up the paper-covered copy of "Little Novels of Italy."

"There," sighed Mrs. Hoyt, "if you can tell me what I am to do with her! The very books she reads are too old for her. She never plays, and when she does, it's——"

"Amateur playing," nodded Kelly thoughtfully.

Mrs. Hoyt shot him a quick glance:

"Can you advise me, Mr. Kelly?"

"Sure, on any subject but children," he regretted genially.

"Or you, Nort?" she appealed.

"Eh? Oh, pardon. Why, since you ask me, Claire, I think you ought not to laugh about her *before* her."

"You mean—smiling about discipline? But there are moments of ugly, raw temper like that, Nort, when the kindest thing you can do is to smile and pass it over."

"She doesn't look like a child given to ugly, raw tempers; she looks—too sensitive."

"She is. She's a darling, really. Only sometimes——"

Others drifted in then, friends from over Garavan way, and the place became the scene of a small, informal party. What with cards and liqueurs, they stayed late. Some one had pounced upon an old crystal ball in Claire's living room, and some one else had suggested that crystal gazing by moonlight was invariably productive of results; so they had all adjourned to the garden again, and one of the women sat solemnly before the ball, which had been placed on the moon-bathed balustrade, and the rest of them sat about in skeptical, smirking silence. Whether visions of the future ever would have clouded those clear crystal depths, they were not to know, for a scraping on stone and a tearing of vines made them look back, toward the high, garden wall, and they saw first two hands, then a head emerge over the top of the wall; then all of a slim, nimble body, drawn up lightly, balancing easily on that high, narrow ledge.

"Why, René!" spoke Mrs. Hoyt at last.

"Ah, m-madame," he stammered. He was utterly taken aback, Griggs decided swiftly, by the number of faces tilted up at him.

"Well, come on over," giggled Claire nervously.

He came, with one hand on the wall, and the light bound of a pole vaulter—motion a pleasure to see. He advanced slowly toward them.

"But why the—the unconventional——"

"Ah, Claire, you will forg-ee-ve me, yes? But your gate is locked—it is stupidly locked—and I do not wish to disturb Pierre—Ninon. I do not know you have zee—guests."

Jobin was now composed. He adjusted his tie, he lit a cigarette.

"It is good s-ing. I have news, I have zee audience. Always I like zee audience. Zee American madame, Claire—zee one wiz zee many diamonds at the Casino this afternoon—is robbed. She is robbed at zee Hôtel des Anglais. It is possible that the police have one clew—one infinitesimal clew—that they trace the thief, and that they find madame's diamond bracelet. I have heard. I run straight to madame to spread her the news."

Another robbery! Excitement flamed high. Jobin was voluble in repetitions and elaborations of these details. It was Mrs. Lewisohn's robbery over again, with the single deviation that this American madame had awakened, had seen the moving bull's-eye of light in her room, had screamed the alarm. The thief had departed swiftly by the balcony, but not without his haul—one pigeon-blood ruby, among other valuables, and such a ruby! Jobin had himself noted that ruby.

"And you were in the neighborhood of the Anglais—heard the rumpus?" asked Kelly lazily.

"Ah, no. I have been drinking wine with a friend at zee moment. But it is all over zee town like a fire—so qu-ce-k."

"So you did the Douglas Fairbanks to us?" grinned Kelly.

"How? Ah, *your* Fairbanks!"

"Movie star, nimble on his feet."

"I, too, am nimble on my feet," admitted the Frenchman complacently.

"Once *I* was nimble on my feet," sighed Kelly whimsically. "You don't believe me—no? Well, I was a football star in my day. Jobin, old fellow—quarterback, with a jack-rabbit get-away. Fact!" Kelly clapped the little Frenchman on the back with the greatest joviality. "To-day," he sighed, "I'm only—nimble in my head. Age!"

The party broke up, but Griggs, now certain of his man, stayed on to warn Claire.

"Has it ever occurred to you," he asked bluntly, "that Jobin is the man the police are looking for?"

"What do you mean?"

"That Jobin is the thief? Claire, I'm sure of it."

"Why—nonsense!" she gasped.

"What do you know of Jobin?"

"Why, everything. His mother—I met his mother in Paris. Fine people. René is an idiot, I grant you," she said impatiently. "But a thief— Why, Nort, René Jobin hasn't the brains to have pulled these really clever robberies. Nonsense!" she went on more firmly. "I'll vouch for René."

"Claire, even your vouching can't move me in my absolute conviction that he is the thief. You simply don't know, dear; he's put it over on you. Listen, Claire, I want to protect you and—Patsy against this fellow. I don't know just what I'm going to do about him. But I want you to promise me to drop him immediately."

"Nort, you're ridiculous. Have you any definite clew?"

"No. Nothing more definite than the suspicion—the certainty!"

"But would he have come straight up here from the robbery to announce it to me—to the whole world?"

"That's exactly what he might do. Many a murderer, you know, has given the alarm with an idea of averting suspicion from himself."

"But do you think René stole my bracelet?" she wondered incredulously.

"I do."

"That's impossible," she assured him triumphantly, "for René wasn't present at the Hôtel d'Angleterre that night; I didn't dance with him, Nort."

"So? Well, I haven't worked it out. Perhaps he's one of a gang. But I want you to drop him, Claire."

"I don't believe it; nothing could make me believe it. Besides, wouldn't my dropping him arouse his suspicions, put him on his guard?"

"I never thought of that. I'm only thinking of you, Claire, and Patsy."

"Too absurd—I don't believe— But he is a complete idiot. It's a lucky thing they were all my friends here to-night, or I don't know what they would have thought of René's unconventional entrance."

It occurred to Griggs that he himself did not know just what he thought of that entrance. But he was no Puritan judge of morals. A credulous and lonely woman— He could even understand and condone, though Claire Hoyt had not seemed that kind. Of course, that would account for her championing of Jobin, would complicate matters. He must get away and mull it over.

"They *didn't* think—anything?"

"No—no, Claire."

"You're sure?"

"Sure."

"Your friend, Mr. Kelly—does he suspect René?"

"I haven't talked to Charlie about Jobin at all."

"And you, Nort— But *you* couldn't think—" Without warning, she dissolved into tears; she dropped her head onto the little iron table and sobbed softly, until young Griggs writhed his discomfort. He patted her arm; he reassured her.

At length she was still; she raised tear-brimmed eyes to him:

"Nort, I—perhaps you're right about René. But I want time. I want your promise not to mention your suspicions to any one—not even to your friend, Mr. Kelly—for a few days; say, not before Saturday, a week from to-day."

"But Friday is the date of Aunt Harriet's musicale, and—"

"Saturday," she insisted.

"Well, but Jobin is invited to the musicale, and—"

"I'll watch René," she promised.

"I'll watch him myself," he swore grimly. "Perhaps Aunt Harriet can

be persuaded to listen to reason in the meantime, but, if she can't, I don't mind telling you that I think it's a risky business—Jobin loose in the room with that star sapphire. Oh, all right," he finished hastily as the tears threatened again.

"Thank you, Nort. You are a— a blessed dear. I can't drop René too abruptly, can I? But I'll start; yes, I will."

Claire rested her head against Griggs' sleeve as he stood beside her. He could take her in his arms, Griggs knew; she wanted him to take her in his arms. But a sudden shudder of distaste ran over and through him, blended with his compassion for her. He said good night. As he passed out through the gate, he fancied he glimpsed a slim little white shape at one of the upper windows, and he smiled at it in the darkness.

Now, in the week intervening between this second Menton robbery and Mrs. Gorton Griggs' musicale, several significant incidents occurred, one of them so dramatically conclusive as to leave Griggs no slightest doubt that he was on the right track. On the Monday following his promise to Claire, she beckoned to him from the plate-glass window of a modiste's shop on the Avenue Félix. He entered, found Patsy being fastened into something very short and dove-colored by a cooing and fluttering saleswoman. The child stood before a mirror, but her head was down, and she traced with the toe of a pale kid slipper the pattern of the rug. When Griggs called her a gay good morning, she looked up, and flushed as though she had been caught without clothes at all.

"There!" patted the saleswoman. "These tuck so?"

"It's good," nodded Claire; "very good. You may send it, mademoiselle. How do you like your new dress, Patsy, dear?"

"I—I hate it."

"How can you be so contrary? Oh, dear! I'm tired, Nort—so fearfully tired. I've not slept for worrying; I must talk to you."

They strolled across to the Promenade, Patsy trailing them listlessly. Mrs. Hoyt propped her elbows on the balustrade and stared at the sea and began a murmur concerning René, when she remembered the child. She looked about impatiently; discovered one of the native donkey women in her flat straw hat, with a patient little beast beside her, and exclaimed: "You shall ride upon the donkey, Patsy. Wouldn't you love that? Here"—she dived into her bag—"give the woman this; tell her to take you for a nice long jog."

"I don't want to ride on a donkey."

"Skip!" laughed Mrs. Hoyt.

"I——"

"Oh, do run along!" The words were tolerant, but the tone was crisp.

Patsy went. She went slowly, with a curious resentment.

Griggs looked after her; his mind was not on Mrs. Hoyt's words.

"Bother—your aunt! Oh, good morning, Mrs. Griggs."

It gave Northam a chance to slip away from them. He followed the child. She was already mounted on the donkey, but there were tears on her cheeks.

"Come down," ordered Griggs. "I need you more than the donkey does, Pat." He lifted her off, dismissed the woman, and wandered with her toward the Carei Gardens, where the morning concert was in progress.

They found chairs and sat and listened to the disreputable-looking foreign band play lazy waltzes, which consisted almost exclusively of flute trills, and looked up at the high, gray amphitheater of the Alps. He pointed out a shining white spot on the top of the tallest mountain.

"St. Agnes; and that white dot is a

café where they serve decent omelets and very good wine. We'll do it, Pat, together, one of these days—two of us, on two donkeys. That's a real use for a donkey, eh?"

"That's what I like about you; you never talk baby talk to me. It's almost as though you knew that——"

"Funny little girl!"

She dripped a tear onto his hand.

Her hat was off, and Griggs, on a paternal impulse, bent and kissed the top of her head, and found her hair soft to the touch, like baby's hair.

Patsy lifted her lips to him, and Griggs kissed her, and found it not at all a baby's kiss. Griggs was startled, and suddenly alive to his finger tips. He had forgotten everything but this delicately flushed face with its serious blue eyes. He remembered— Why, it was a public garden, and he ought to be kicked. But no one was watching them. It was natural to these demonstrative, indifferent French people for a grown man to caress a little girl; it was natural to Patsy herself; it was only his own confounded imagination!

Patsy sucked in her breath.

"Listen: she'd kill me if she knew I—but you mustn't like her; you mustn't come near her— Hush!" she finished, "Here they come."

Mrs. Griggs' left glove was off, and her hand was stuck out at Mrs. Hoyt, who examined, with close admiration, the famous milky-blue sapphire with its six-pointed star reflection.

"I do like that tiny vine in the setting," murmured Claire, turning it.

"Tiffany—quite common."

"Hm—two leaves. It's an absolute beauty, Mrs.——"

"But good Heaven, Aunt Harriet, you couldn't pick a more public place to——"

"Will you stop your eternal fussing, Northam? With sneak thieves about, I consider it safer to wear my ring. With the ring on my own finger, I know

where it is. Any thief," she concluded grimly, "will take it from me over my dead body."

"That's just," groaned Griggs, "what he will do."

"I agree with you, Nort," said Claire. "I've told her it's unsafe. I wish, Mrs. Griggs, that you could be persuaded to deposit it in a safety vault—especially with your big Friday night affair so near. My own experience——"

"Stuff!" was Mrs. Griggs' terse comment.

"Don't argue with her, Claire," begged Griggs. "Don't you know, by this time, that the one sure way to make Aunt Harriet do what you don't want her to is to argue with her?"

Jobin and Kelly strolled into the square—a curious combination, but for two days now, Kelly had been carelessly courting the Frenchman.

"I'll just put down the address of that shop," said Claire, taking out a little notebook. "René is going up to Paris this afternoon—— Oh, he'll be back for the musicale," she assured Griggs, with a special glance. He *would* be back, Griggs was convinced, for he saw that Jobin was not missing the star sapphire. "But he'll have time to do an errand for me."

They separated, and Griggs was taken in tow by his aunt. He listened absently to her complaints about the loss of her left glove—a new snuff-colored suède.

On the afternoon before the musicale occurred the dramatic climax of this chain of small happenings. Griggs had put in three restless and irritable days. Kelly had been called to Paris, but he would certainly return before Friday evening. Before his departure he had extracted from Griggs the admission that the latter had warned Mrs. Hoyt of Jobin; he had given his friend the snap character of "the world's boniest bone-head," and had hastily exacted from

him a promise that he would tell no one of his—Kelly's—trip to Paris.

"I am in Nice, if you like; or I've taken a rubberneck jaunt into Italy; but never breathe Kelly and Paris together! We're off! Au revoir, Griggsy."

So Griggs had had leisure to think. But he grew impatient of leisure, and his thinking was negligible. He divided his time between the olive-shaded paths and mule tracks which looped back into the mountains, and an hour-glass chair in Claire Hoyt's garden. He covered feverish kilometers, or he sat moodily. Claire moved before him in a procession, of black gowns relieved by a procession of accessories, from the silver chain with the Florentine cross to the Russian-glass bracelets. She poured him china tea or cognac, as the occasion required. She was sympathetic and wholly lovely. Yet Griggs scarcely saw her.

The truth was that his thoughts were playing with the possibility that Patsy might, at any instant, break through one of those French windows. To be sure, Patsy had been packed off to bed with one of her colds, so Mrs. Hoyt informed him, and he had not glimpsed her since that morning in the Carei Gardens. But Patsy was not always obedient. There was just the chance. Curious how that small face with its pale, clipped hair and its clear blue eyes haunted him like the thread of a tantalizing and elusive tune. A little girl of thirteen—— Why, he must be mad! Of course, he only wanted to hear the end of the thing she had started to tell him when they were interrupted—that was it. Mere curiosity.

He would send her bonbons. He stepped into Bosio's and had a gay little box filled and tied up as only the French can do it. But, no, he couldn't. It smacked too definitely of the sort of attention he might have paid to an older Patsy. Besides, bonbons would be ruinous to a sick child. A doll, he

thought ironically, would be more in order.

Oddly, it was the doll, Mary-Rose, who played the lead in the amazing discovery. They were in the garden, and Claire had been murmuring to him some long and dolorous tale.

"But you're not listening to me, Northam Griggs!" she broke off. She scolded him a little, and she teased him, and finally she came and stood over him and played with a lock of his hair.

It was then that the thing for which Griggs waited happened. Patsy came through the living-room window. She paid no attention to her mother's angry exclamation, and she paid no attention to Griggs' greeting. She had her doll, and she sat herself down on the sunny gravel, and began to play with it in businesslike fashion.

"Mary-Rose," she said, "your petticoat hangs below. Don't you know, anyway, that petticoats have gone out of style? I think, Mary-Rose——"

Mrs. Hoyt was staring in fascination at the doll. Griggs felt it; spared a glance from Patsy herself. He gaped in turn.

He transferred his attention to Claire, who was as white as a gardenia; then back to Mary-Rose. But they must be genuine, with a sparkle like that! What——

Mrs. Hoyt hesitated a moment longer. Then:

"Bring it to mother, Patsy," she ordered.

Patsy obeyed.

Mrs. Hoyt removed the glittering circlet from the doll's neck, fingered it. She still hesitated.

"It's not——"

"Oh, yes, it is," said Patsy with certainty. "It's your bracelet, mamma. See the scratch on the platinum, right here?"

"But it is—it *is* my bracelet."

Mrs. Hoyt was stunned; she was watching Patsy, who stood erect before her, every trace of listlessness gone.

"But w-where did you find it?"

"In the little blue rose jar, mamma—under the rose petals."

"The—rose jar? Ah"—rapidly—"the potpourri that Monsieur Jobin gave to me. That will do. Go, Patsy!" Mrs. Hoyt's voice was like a knife thrust. She added gently: "Ninon will take you to Rumpelmayer's for an ice—that is, if you're feeling able, Patsy. Mother is grateful—so grateful to you for finding her bracelet."

The child trotted off, suddenly all obedience.

"But how——" Claire wondered helplessly.

"You see? Jobin! It *is* Jobin. Somehow he——"

"But I didn't see René that night."

"Not for one minute? Think, Claire."

"Why, an instant," she remembered. "He was tired out from the tennis tournament, but he came to the door, just for a second, still in his tennis flannels, and he made an engagement with me for——"

"So! You see I am right; this is the proof. Clever of him. He hid them in your house as the most unlikely place for any one to search for them—probably feared that he himself might be suspected."

"That accounts," she trailed him rapidly, "for his eccentric gift of the rose jar that must not be touched. It does fit in, doesn't it, Nort, dear?"

"Fits like a jig-saw puzzle. Claire, I'm going direct to the police! I'm going to tell them——"

"No, no! I—Nort, I've got to have time to think. To-morrow—you promised to wait till after to-morrow."

"But surely you wouldn't hold me to the promise now?"

"I've got to have time," she insisted, half hysterical. "You did promise?"

"Yes."

"Well, then——"

"All right," he surrendered glumly.

"Nort, I—you don't understand," she pleaded; "I'm not so unreasonable as I seem."

"I do understand," said Griggs.

"Besides"—her voice was hard now—"I think I know a way. I hate him—I do! You leave it to me, Nort. I'll trap him, cold."

"I don't quite get you, my dear. But, with your permission, Claire, I'll station a few detectives about Aunt Harriet's house to-morrow night, just in case your plan fails."

"Detectives? Oh, yes, lots of them. But you'll wait for my signal, before you set them after René? Good!"

The conclusion followed quickly—so quickly that Griggs was still groping in the dark when the business was all over and Kelly—the wise and disgusted Kelly—had to reach him a hand.

The program went off smoothly enough. Patsy, a delicate study in porcelain blue, preceded the English soprano of the evening with a little tinkling, music-box, piano piece. Patsy's mother registered such shining pride in the child that people spoke of it.

Jobin was among those present, and Griggs watched him steadily. Indeed, he felt as though he and Jobin and the star sapphire, which glowed through the evening on the finger of his royally unconscious Aunt Harriet, were playing a wary game of pussy-wants-a-corner. Claire, oblivious, was not in on the game at all, so far as he could see. They had reached the supper stage, and people stood and sat about, tasting, sipping, chatting:

"A perfectly unbelievable sunset, and we saw Corsica, truly, like a pink mirage—"

"That dissipated old countess! My dear, a history—"

"No flowers?" he said, and we simply sat tight and smuggled in a tonneau load of roses from Bordighera. Duty on flowers is absurd, don't you think?"

"Yes, my system is based on the number three."

"Tickets for that Russian ballet at Monte—"

"But, yes, precious stones really are fragrant. How do I know? Because I've made a study of them. You'd never guess the curious lore I've gathered by delving back into old Middle-Age tomes." It was Claire, and Griggs, standing over Patsy, who was engaged with the most fascinating mousse which he could find for her, saw that Patsy's mother was the center of an interested group.

"Sounds learned."

"Yes. I can be learned on occasion," laughed Claire. "Take amber. Do you know the peculiar fragrance of amber? And amber oil really does cure rheumatism, you know. The five precious fragments are ruby, topaz, emerald, sapphire and hyacinth, and each one has its special curative properties, and its own subtle fragrance. The ruby—" She turned the red stone on her finger thoughtfully.

"Yes, yes?"

"Platform for Mrs. Hoyt! On with your lecture, Claire. Rubies?"

"Oh, Patsy," she called over, "my scarf. I left it out on the bench in the garden, or in the car somewhere. Will you find it for me? Perhaps Mr. Griggs will go with you. Rubies? Why, nothing, only—"

It was barely three minutes later when Griggs, vaguely uneasy, sent the Burton boy on with Patsy and himself returned to the house.

He found a curious game in progress. They stood about in a circle, Jobin next to Claire, and several bits of jewelry, among them Claire's own ruby ring, were being passed about and sniffed at.

"The palest peach-blossom odor—don't you get it? Diamonds are disagreeable, but sapphires are faintly resinous—ozone and pine needles."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Griggs, but she

A4

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removed the star sapphire from her finger, skeptically sniffed it. She ran her eye about the circle, as though reassuring herself on the absolute reliability of every person in it, and carelessly added the sapphire to the exhibit.

"Oh, my Heaven, have a care!" laughed Tubby Withers. "Talk about your demonstrations of faith!"

"Among friends, silly, one doesn't—
Can't smell a thing myself."

"I won't touch it, Mrs. Griggs, so don't hold me if——"

The sapphire had traveled the circle; in one instant it would reach Claire, then Jobin. Griggs stood paralyzed. What could Claire Hoyt be thinking of? Was this, perhaps, her game to catch Jobin? But it was too dangerous.

Claire put out her hand for the ring, but Griggs reached it before her.

"Here," he protested, "I—this is an idiotic game."

Claire's black eyes flashed at him.

"You mean," she challenged, "that you don't trust me?"

"I don't mean anything except that it's a fool's game." But he met her eyes quite firmly.

Claire shrugged, rose; she laughed, murmured a few careless words, and moved away with Jobin.

"You—you blithering idiot!" said Kelly in Griggs' ear. "They've gone. In one blink she would have had the ring, and we would have had her—cold! With the goods on her. And now they've gone—over the line into Italy by this time! We know, but we can't prove a thing on them."

"You don't mean that Claire—Mrs. Hoyt——"

"I do mean that she's probably Clara Collins, and that Jobin is probably Pierre Bollat, and that the pair of them are wanted not only by the French police for these jewel thefts, but by the New York police for the famous Blaisdon robbery."

"But—but——"

"You've fixed it," growled Kelly in complete disgust.

After the guests' departure he became patient enough to explain it to Griggs.

"He was the legs of the combination, and she was the fingers and the brains. Safes were her job; balconies were his. They had to go about to affairs together, for their whole system in these clever social robberies depended upon teamwork. The theft of her own bracelet removed her from all suspicion."

"But the risks she took, Kelly——"

"She took a certain artist's pride in playing the daring game; considered it safer, too."

"Her husband, the mourning?"

"Bunk. Part of the pose."

"And Patsy?"

"Bunk, too, but I'm not just prepared to say—there was something darned queer about that kid."

"Patsy was not in on it! I'd swear she was not. Why, she tried her best, Kelly, to give the game away to me."

"Huh!" said Kelly.

"But I don't yet understand how——"

"An imitation star sapphire, copied down to the last carved leaf in the setting. I know that Jobin obtained the imitation; it was his reason for going to Paris, and my reason for following him. They would have exchanged the copy for the real ring, and cleared out before they were discovered."

"Aunt Harriet's glove," recalled Griggs.

"Huh?"

"Why, they must have used it to determine the size!"

Griggs solved, very satisfactorily, the mystery of Patsy on the following morning. He wandered up to the Villa Berthe, expecting to find it closed and deserted. He found it closed, but not completely deserted. Something of porcelain blue was curled up in the hour-glass chair in the garden; Patsy's serious blue eyes stared up at him.

"But—but your mother hasn't left you?"

"She's not my mother; she's only my step-mother," said Patsy clearly. "Father left me money which is held in trust for me till my twenty-first birthday; meantime, the income goes to my guardian, and she kept me for that."

"And now she's left you?" he asked her.

"Because she couldn't manage me any longer; because I tried to tell you."

"You—know then?"

"Know!" She laughed.

"But you can't stay on here, alone, dear. You——"

"I'll be all right. I have my money; in a year I'll be my own guardian."

"Not till you're twenty-one, you said. Listen, Pat, you—you can't stay here. I—I'll take you to Aunt Harriet. I'll adopt you."

Patsy smiled.

"You can't adopt me."

"No? Perhaps not. If you were only older——"

"What would you do if I were older?"

"Dash it all, Pat, I—I'd marry you!"

"I am older."

"What!"

"Stupid, don't you see? That was the trouble. I am twenty, Mr. Griggs."

"But—but—twenty years? You? No!"

"Is there any way I can convince you? Heroine usually puts on a dinner gown and turns up her hair. But I haven't a single grown-up dress to my name—nothing but these ghastly baby things—and my hair—it won't turn up, will it, Mr. Griggs? Nort, then!"

"I thought——" Griggs murmured into the depths of the hour-glass chair some minutes later. And again, much later: "I thought—but, honey, what does it matter? Only why did you let her?"

"Because I had no backbone until I met you. Besides, it didn't matter so much before. I didn't guess until just lately that there was anything dishonest about it; I only thought she wanted to act the rôle of devoted mother and to seem young at the same time—a part of her society game. Now I understand that I was her—her gesture of respectability. Is there anything, Nort, more respectable than mother love?"

"You funny, wise little—— But you were an awfully serious kid, Pat. I'm going to teach you to play. Eh? What's that?"

"Let's begin," murmured Patsy into his necktie.



NEW YORK has traffic towers not only in the streets, but on the dinner table. After-dinner speakers are warned by miniature traffic towers on the speakers' table when it is time to end their speeches. Green and amber lights give warning, and red lights flash for a full stop. But will the genial speakers watch the traffic signals?



"I BELIEVE I have been through purgatory," the late Pierre Loti remarked after his trip to America. "It's a hell. If that is what's called progress, give me anything before this agitated turmoil. How can I live at ease in a country of triumphant materialism where there is no leisure for contemplation or an instant's meditation?" The terrible reporters gave him no peace, and after his return to France he never spoke of his trip to America.



Poor Estelle!

By Frances O. J. Gaither

Author of "Cousin of the Moon,"
"The Screen," etc.



AND then on the very morning they were to dock she was cross with him. It was the more surprising in that the willful words leaped right out of the deepest sense of beatitude she had yet felt. The homeward journey had been best of all, somehow—perhaps because it *was* homeward. Anyway, they had traveled over seas like a mill pond all the way across, through linked blue-and-white days and silver-starred nights. The remembered ripple of Latin tongues, wash of the Adriatic, gentle pulse of a moored gondola, beat yet in her ears, one with the thrum of the homebound ship, one with her own singing conviction that their perfect honeymoon was prelude of a rare and perfect harmony. She was happiest of all going home. And then she flared into that incredible irritability:

"If you call me 'poor Dora,' I can't bear it."

True, it was a single speech slipping out through unguarded lips. Yet it shamed and shocked her. How could she introduce one jarring note into their idyl? She had never, she knew, loved him quite so much as when she looked up and saw him in the wan dawn that drained through the silk-curtained windows, saw him moving through the cabin toward her, so big and dependable in his purple dressing gown caught quickly about him. In the frippery jewel-box

luxury of the tiny suite he loomed suddenly real and stupendous. Her whole conscious thought dwelt upon the discovery that the slightest and most temporary adversity had now its sweet uses, since it revealed to her that a husband is more than the companion of gilded holidays. She was actually thanking Heaven for him at the instant when her willful lips forestalled the commiserating phrase she fancied him about to speak.

"If you say that, I'll scream."

Naturally he didn't say it. In fact he said nothing at all. He closed his parted lips instead and tied his dressing gown with a certain air of formality. Altogether he appeared as hurt as he had every right to feel. Dora stared at him in consternation. The echo of her unreasonableness hung jangling. She hurried to drown it. She filled the air with a little rush of high-pitched words about last night's indiscretion. Those silly chocolates. She had lacked the moral courage to refuse them. But candy had made her ill ever since she was a little child.

"I was only going to offer to ring for the stewardess," he stated his just grievance. "But, of course, if the sound of my voice will make you scream——"

"Oh, my dear, not the sound of your voice—not that!"

"Well?"

"I just didn't want——"

"My sympathy, Dora?"

Of course they had quarreled before, as lovers do, but not like this; never, never like this. He was so overwhelming, so formidable, so Olympian and immovable, looming in the thin dawn light above her culpable self, frowning slightly, his big thumbs hooked in the cord of his dressing gown, speaking down to her in a glacial voice.

"I knew it was nothing—over in a minute—always is," she stammered. "I couldn't bear for you to bother——"

"But why you should put words into my mouth—words I had no intention of speaking! When have I annoyed you by calling you 'poor Dora?'"

"Never."

"Then what in the world?"

The complete irrelevance of any third person at this moment was self-evident. Far be it from Dora to invite another woman by so much as her whispered name into the poison-sweet privacy of their first real quarrel. An interloper is bad enough in bliss, but absolutely unthinkable in a divided instant like this. Wherefore Dora said:

"Nothing. I meant nothing. I'm merely a nasty little beast with quick claws."

But long after he had thawed to stated forgiveness and gone back to sleep she lay in her own bed, hands crossed under her head, and pondered the torrential panic she had yielded to when she fancied her husband about to address her in the phrase he habitually employed of another woman.

She lay thinking back to the first time she had heard him say it and had felt inexplicably a shock of recoil.

They were sitting on a marble seat in the stately and beautiful garden of Dora's home. It was fall; just last fall. Their blissful engagement was two weeks old; their blissful acquaintance perhaps thrice that. Leaves as ruddy as squirrels sped along the sunken white

walk and piled up in the stone lily pad of the fountain; piled up warmly against the little thighs and feet of the chilly stone baby. A good sort of morning, cool air and hot sun, just enough wind to spin the leaves and diffuse that dry smell which crumbling seed pods give a garden. Dora had on a new homespun skirt and a soft sweater in the colors of the squirrel-ruddy leaves. She had been sitting quiet ever so long, simply steeping in content, letting her wonderful lover keep her hand cupped in his. He had been silent, too, for long minutes before that. He had only just set a kiss in Dora's palm—such a dear, tingling kiss—when, as if moved by some secret spring, he dropped her hand and said perhaps he should tell her about the woman he had been engaged to before he knew her.

There is something a little hard about being quite desperately in love with a man nearly twice your age. It's a mad, unsatisfiable feeling like starvation in the midst of plenty. For, no matter how reciprocally he loves you, there are always opening at your feet these divergent paths through the maze of years he's been a grown man while you were in the school room, and all those other years of his boyhood when you simply were not—half his life you can't share in. Dora wasn't the least bit jealous of the woman her lover had formerly been engaged to. But she did begrudge the other any moment out of the golden present. Her dropped hand lay upturned like an empty cup while her lover talked about another woman.

"I suppose it would be unnatural, really, if there never had been any one else," she said, hurrying him. "And, since the engagement was a mistake, it was just fortunate you found out in time."

"You're a good sport, Dora."

"Oh, no. It's only that I really do think it was lucky for you to find out your mistake early enough. So many

realize too late, when they're already married. I'm glad you've only a broken engagement for a scar, not a divorce. And—I do think it's nice of you, telling me, not leaving me to find out even that by chance. That's like you. But now you *have* told me, we needn't go on talking about it, need we? The whole thing was over a year before you and I met each other. So it all has nothing to do with us, has it?"

"Nothing to do with us."

He echoed her, she thought, relievedly, and caught her hand up to his lips. Her eyes shut on the joy of his kiss in her thirsting palm. Not looking at him, she thought, of course, his kiss put a period to that tiresome interruption. And then he said it the first time. Right after kissing her he said:

"Poor Estelle."

Lying awake on the home-coming morning of her honeymoon journey, Dora could have counted on one hand the times after that first time. Once, upon their wedding day, holding Dora close with one arm while he awkwardly opened and read and crumpled a telegram: "Nothing, dear; just good wishes from poor Estelle." Once, being read to, suddenly opening his eyes: "Ah, there, Dora, dear, read those last lines again. They are favorites of poor Estelle's." Once before a fresco of Gozzoli's; once buying a melon for Dora in Naples; once in a golden noon at Nice, elbows on a stone parapet, eyes on far blue seas, arm warm against Dora's arm: "Poor Estelle!"

Repeated so exactly the words were barren and ritualistic like a genuflection at an empty shrine. How had they the power to disturb her so? Mere wisps of mention, drifting up from oblivion, not above half a dozen in all, scant enough trace to be left by a woman once intimately known if not authentically beloved. Horace Winton's habitual manner of speaking of the woman he had formerly been engaged to was the

mere ghost of memory, tenuous, evanescent. Yet always, to a degree Dora couldn't in the least account for, the phrase, half sighed, half spoken, trailed a shadow across her brightest joy. Poor Estelle!

Dora gave herself a little shake of exasperation at her morbidness and looked at her wrist watch. Then she sprang up, thrust toes in ribboned mules, and padded over to wake her husband. She sat on the edge of his bed and turned his face up out of the pillow. He blinked at her.

"Forgiven me?" she asked.

His big arms came up about her shoulders. He held her close.

"What for, beloved?"

She laughed. The broad reaches of his magnanimity spread like the bosom of the ocean under her gull-winged dartings.

"I was cross as anything to you. Have you forgot?"

"Oh, that! Half asleep, both of us. Feel all right?"

"Right as right. I always do penance for chocolates, but when it's done, it's done."

"Glad to get home, Mrs. Winkums?" The little special private name was taken from the rendering of Dora's new and dignified "Mrs. Winton" by the English baby who had taken such a fancy to her in Rome. "Glad the fun's over, cake all eaten, time for bread and butter?"

How glad she was made her suddenly inarticulate.

"U-m-m."

She dropped her eyes shyly before his upward gaze which devoured her in the dear way he had. Then on a tide of bliss she couldn't resist she became articulate. So glad. So glad. Getting home was, after all, the real beginning. Dora didn't want just a holiday husband. Or to be a holiday wife. She was a rain-or-shine person. Did he know? Did he surely know?

"Never have any sort of hard luck to prove me, Mr. Winkums. But all the same, if ever you do——" Dora's vow, too sacred to repeat aloud, she bent lower yet to whisper into her husband's ear. Holy words from a holy book, new infused with tender meaning, Dora whispered to her husband: for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. "Mustn't be a maudlin bride," she broke off capriciously. "Lot to do before we dock."

She flushed with honest shame as she bent over her dressing table. Gracious. Gracious! What a vaporish person she was getting to be now that she was married! Horace hadn't said a word; not one. He had merely sighed in the midst of her solemn vow. Or maybe he hadn't even sighed. Maybe he'd only breathed along her cheek and made her shiver. It was too ridiculous, Dora's fancying he was thinking of any one else. His escaping breath had slid across her cheek, stirred her short hair at the roots, sent her hurrying from him before he could speak—if indeed he had been going to speak.

A cold, sleety rain stippled the harbor. The face of the water below the ship's side lay flat and gray and curiously pitted with the fine, stabbing drops. The rain hid familiar landmarks, wrapped others in illusory strangeness. Liberty, glimpsed suddenly on the left, was a robed Atlas bearing heaven in one hand. Manhattan, veiled to that obscurity we associate with vast distance and diminished perspective, loomed unbelievably titanic. Seen as dim as any remote mountain peak and yet enormous, because contradictorily near, the pile showed God-reared, never the work of man. Its crags lifted, strange and minatory, above the ghostly ferries scurrying crabwise at its base.

Mrs. Horace Winton in her very heaviest coat—spring though it was—leaned at the rail with her husband and watched the familiar shores of home dis-

solve and distort themselves to new and strange proportions in the rain.

"Maybe you should go on out home by the first train, Mrs. Winkums."

"Oh, please. Let's don't let a little rain spoil our plans. I've my heart set on your taking me home this first time."

Her gloved hand stole into his elbow. He gave it a squeeze that imprisoned it against his side. She felt his heart beat through his thick top coat.

"You aren't morbid about the house, Dora? It won't seem less your own just because it happened to be built while I was engaged to——"

Oh, she hoped he didn't notice how she flinched before that which he didn't even speak. Surely he didn't notice. Certainly his speech was broken off, not by Dora's start, but by a shipmate's coming up to say good-by. No, he didn't notice. Although Dora's wrist ached with the wrench of her spasmodic recoil, her husband was entirely oblivious to anything amiss. He smiled indulgently at her withdrawal. Doubtless he thought she was shy of having an outsider find them arm in arm. Oh, he couldn't even think anything but dear and generous things about Dora. But Dora! She stared into the rain and wished its coldness could drench her, wash her clean of the taint of distrust.

"You must come out to see us while you're in New York. Mustn't he, Dora?"

It was that nice Mr. Ladislav of Virginia she was ignoring!

"Do come," she urged him cordially, giving him a penitent hand. "We'll love having you."

In Horace's office Dora sat with her fur neck piece loosened and contentedly watched him in a rôle new to her; no holiday husband, no indeed; a brisk man of affairs, genial to his employees, hearty and frank to his colleagues, expert in decision, parrying small annoyances, simple and direct on any main issue. Dora was no fool sitting small and aloof

in her husband's office. She weighed and measured him. "I'm glad he's nearly twice my age. He towers above ordinary men. He's really tremendous. And I haven't fully known it. I've loved him outrageously, but I haven't appreciated him enough."

"See here, Coates, I didn't write you about that Algerian business because I wanted to talk to you about it. We may have to send a competent man over at once. Certain aspects of larger import than immediate gain to the company—of really international significance in case France—— But we'll go into all that to-morrow. To-day's a holiday with me, officially speaking. Yes, celebrating my home-coming. By the way, Coates, I'd like to present you——"

Dora offered Horace's senior partner a cool hand and a gracious greeting. While she spoke she silently appraised him as her Horace's inferior. When he went out her eyes followed him, triumphing that his very shoulders were the narrower.

"Now—that's that. Through till to-morrow. We'll take one look at this mail, Mrs. Winkums, and go celebrate. Mind waiting one minute more, small one?"

Hers again. Three minutes ago talking of matters of international significance, now calling her intimate, tender names, all hers. She bent a fond, proud gaze upon him as she fastened her fur again and sat forward in her chair to be ready the instant he should have finished reading his mail. The matter of a few moments that would be, plainly, for he barely glanced at each letter as he slit the envelope of the next succeeding one. She thought it was inexpressibly dear of Horace to hurry through his important mail so swiftly for her sake. She wanted very much to steal over there and kiss the back of his neck, but the proximity of formal filing cabinets and other official things like that overwhelmed her with a quite delicious

humility. She was very happy waiting shyly for her wonderful husband to finish his mail.

"By the way, Dora, call this number, won't you, and get an appointment as early after lunch as possible?"

She leaned forward, took the scribbled memorandum, and lifted the desk telephone off to her knee.

"An appointment for you, Horace?"

"No, dear, no. For you. Ask for Doctor Callowell. I won't have a wife I can't give candy to."

"But, my dear, how foolish! I never felt better. I——"

"Never mind, Mrs. Winkums. Didn't you promise to obey?"

Yielding was wine sweet. The heady, bubbly bliss of all the ways a husband is nicer than a lover stung her throat and made her eyes swim. He hadn't even looked up at her. But the spell of his will fell sweet and heavy upon her. As husky as one drugged she repeated the number into the mouthpiece. She called for Doctor Callowell. She got an appointment for two o'clock.

"What is it, Horace?"

She fairly jumped. He had looked up suddenly at her in a way that made some inner alarm chime distressfully. But he didn't answer, and at once he dropped his eyes again to the letter in his hand. It was a different sort of letter, squareish, creased longitudinally, altogether like a personal letter. From where she sat she could plainly see loose black script sprawling across the cream-colored sheet. She thought he read the first page twice again after he looked up at her, but no more than that. He must have read the first page twice again rapidly, or else once very slowly, but no more. Then he swung around in his swivel chair and stretched out the hand with the letter in it. He gave the letter to Dora right away.

Dora read a date a week old and:

DEAR MR. WINTON: My daughter Estelle died yesterday, Thursday, at ten in the morn-

ing at St. Luke's Hospital. She was conscious up to the—

Dora's attention sprang away from the catalogue of circumstantial trivialities with which, pathetically, people seek to wreath the grim fact of death. Dora's attention leaped off the letter to her husband. Before she could lift eyes, she listened. Sensitized to inordinate awareness, her hearing strained toward him. As if with animal delicateness of perception, her whole self listened. The faint squeak of his chair swinging back to rest, the sliding of his arm across his desk with the little scraping of the cuff button along the glass surface, the crackle of the envelope he yet held, all the tiny sounds which fill a speechless interval, quivered across the antennæ of her stretched nerves.

"Poor Estelle," said Horace after a little.

The house which stood ready for Horace Winton's bride was of warm brick with green blinds. It was not, perhaps, a remarkable house. But it had distinctly a lot of pleasant qualities. Above all, it was a stanch and reassuring house with solid columns creamy white against its brick walls. It was cheerful, too, flaunting like a banner—or, no, more like a friend's handkerchief waved in greeting—a dainty curtain at an upper window which stood open. By some special dispensation of Providence, the morning's rain hadn't fallen at all on the house which stood ready for the bride's welcome. It was even warm here. The brick walls and the green blinds and the flashing white curtain were bright with spring sunshine.

The little garden at the left of the house, glimpsed obliquely from the square of red tiles before the entrance, was bright, too, in the four o'clock sunniness. It was, of all the gardens you ever saw, the most tempting: twisty paths marked as with colored ribbons by more flowers than you would believe

could be in bloom all at once and so early, too; a latticed arbor painted white and showing through its vines like the lace of delicate lingerie through chiffons; a bird bath, white, too, and nearly hidden, as proper bird baths are, by shrubs and things; and just this side of the arbor a busy old gardener wearing a blue shirt and red suspenders as a gardener ought to do. The garden of Dora's memory had been stately, a place of terraces and fountains and wide vistas. This was immediately dearer, somehow, intimate and caressing as a wreath new-gathered for a girl's brow.

The fresh little garden which was waiting for Dora confirmed, even insisted upon, that happiness which should crown a bride's home-coming. All ready to enwreath her, flowering embodiment of Horace's love, it shamed her for her petulance at his eleventh hour defection. "If you don't mind, Mrs. Winkums, I believe I'll reconsider and stay in town after all for a bit of a conference with Coates." This, after their curiously lugubrious lunch! And before she could marshal her faltering reasons why he ought not to abandon her *to-day*, he had abandoned her. And she—well, she could not summon magnanimity enough to forgive him until she saw that gracious house and the little garden waiting to twine its tendrils close about her. And then—of such fragile threads do lovers spin dissension and reunion—contrition took her.

Seeing their home, she promptly forgave him. Forgiving him, she did more than that. She surrendered anew to the bliss of adoring him. She adored the bricks he had caused to be placed one upon the other to make such stanch protecting walls. She adored the cool green blinds, and surely the little dainty curtain crisply waving over her head. She adored the arbor and the bird bath and the twisty paths all ribboned in bright bloom. Oh, Horace! Oh, Mr. Winkums! What a nasty beast with

quick claws was Dora to be cross and petulant because you changed your mind and took an extra hour in town! A paltry hour for business after months of sheer devotion to Dora.

Dora simply loved her house. That was all there was to it. She had to hold herself down not to hug the sweet-faced maid who admitted her and stood demurely to her command. All her belief that home-coming was the real beginning of everything returned to her now sevenfold increased.

Such a lot of things in the house were Dora's own: the glass-domed clock in the dining room, the inlaid writing desk in the library at the window overlooking the garden, the spindle bed and the medallion-back rocker in the room of the blowing dimity—Dora's room—Oh, a lot of things already unpacked and in place, besides all the boxes and barrels in the basement laden with Dora's wedding presents. A sudden affection for that never half-seen, glittering array came over her. She had taken a detached view of such gross facts as presents at the halcyon time of marrying Horace; but now, a spendthrift of bliss, she surprisingly yearned over them. She wanted to open all the cases at once—did open one barrel. But then, when she and the demure maid had got it only half unpacked, she looked up from the litter of straw and glass and silver, remembering she hadn't really seen her garden yet.

Her returned happiness made her erratic. She was a greedy urchin at a charity dinner, tasting everything, finishing nothing. She left the submissive maid to cope with tangled straw and silver and glass and flew away to explore her garden.

She thought at first that he was deaf, thought that he hadn't heard her coming up behind him on the path where he stooped above his satin-bright borders. She thought it was because he hadn't

heard her that he was so startled. The stooping gardener straightened with a jerk and stared, oddly aghast.

"I am Mrs. Winton."

She tried not to laugh. But he was funny. Surely he was deaf. His look of bewilderment didn't clear in the least when she told him who she was, and his reply most strangely was:

"Mother of God!"

"Your borders are exquisite."

"It's kind your young eyes are to an old man's efforts, ma'am."

Not deaf! His answer came swift and pat to her compliment. His words ran readily at the heels of hers but they were empty-pated words. The old gardener's peering eyes stared at her as vacantly as when he had first started up at her approach.

"You were expecting us to-day," said Dora kindly. "The garden shows that. It seems strange you should be so startled at seeing me."

He squinted his beady eyes, muttered evasions out of which she got this only: he had been surprised at the short black hair of her. But why should it surprise him? Why should Dora be expected to have hair that wasn't black?

Out of the interstellar spaces where truth lives, there came blowing into Dora's heart with whistling keenness the news that the other woman Horace had been engaged to had had fair hair and long. No one had ever told Dora that. No one told her now. She just knew it. She suddenly knew why the gardener had been startled.

Told merely to make ready for Horace Winton's bride, he had, in his simplicity, made ready for some one other than Dora, some one who had formerly walked here, perhaps often walked here, his promised mistress; come here and been kind to the bent old gardener before Dora came and was kind; praised his borders before Dora praised them. The gardener loved her who first praised his flowers so much that he had left for

any other mistress only distrust and hostility.

It didn't matter much. It was really rather funny and pathetic—after the first shock of it. Dora restrained a quick-winged smile tugging the corners of her mouth up. She wanted to be kind. Gently, oh so gently, as gently as though she were stepping among his choicest blooms, Dora spoke the other woman's name and said:

"It was she you were expecting. But she is dead. I'm sorry."

It was a queer, incredible moment. First, Dora restraining a smile at the pathetic loyalty of the old servitor, putting out a palm to him in a gesture that was half gracious and forgiving, half wistful and pleading, Dora quaintly begging her gardener's pardon because it was she who stood on the twisting path he had garlanded in pink-and-purple hyacinth and cool green sheaves for some one else. And then Dora, still between the serpentine lines of pink-and-purple bloom and green-spiked foliage, but no longer gracious or wistful; Dora, panting, listening—listening, as with animal awareness—Dora's whole self listening for—what *was* Dora listening for? What creeping, stalking menace to her most private joy was Dora straining to hear while the old keening voice rasped her ears?

"Dead, is it? Ah, it's lucky are the angels in heaven that do be combing out her pretty yellow hair the day. Dead! An' it like yesterday she helped me plant me hyacinths. Two years, though. All of two years and a bit besides. Sure an' it's only the stubborn Irish heart of me wantin' a miracle made me think at all he was bringin' her home a bride. Ah, the pretty darlin', so easy tired and tryin' so hard to hide it from him. Weary as she was with the bit o' plantin', it was wearier yet she was with waitin' for her weddin'. 'Don't let him find out I stopped to rest, Barney,' she says to me, an' him gone

to the telephone. 'Don't tell tales, Barney, or he'll be makin' me postpone the weddin' again, an' it postponed three times already! He's that careful of me, Barney.'"

"Dora!"

When Dora heard her husband call her she did not answer or go to him, but walked quickly away instead down the path to a little sanctuary of shrubs at the bottom of it. There she stood with her two hands pushed hard against her heart and tried to steady her breathing before Horace should find her. It was such a tiny garden. He'd find her in another minute. She'd say:

"Horace, you never told me she was ill."

"No, Mrs. Winkums? Surely you're mistaken. Well, maybe I didn't. I was going to tell you a lot about her one day——"

"About her pretty light hair and about her being ill, Horace?"

"Very likely. I'd have been glad to tell you all about her, but you said, 'She has nothing to do with us,' didn't you, Mrs. Winkums? Very sensibly you brought me back to the really important business of our love-making. Remember, Mrs. Winkums?"

"How are you, Barney, old fellow?" Horace Winton's voice speaking genially to his gardener rang mellow and clear. "Hyacinths blooming first rate, aren't they? I know we'll make a ten strike with Mrs. Winton on our hyacinths, Barney. By the way, have you seen her about? Thank."

His steps nibbled the rest of the graveled path and his tremendous shadow fell upon Dora shrinking down on a hard-slatted bench. The sun was back of him going down beyond the farthest hedge; and back of him, too, but nearer, stood the marble bird basin with one bather just skimming it. The sanctuary of shrubs had a wide-open door through which Horace came with the sun behind him. Dora couldn't see

him very clearly, somehow. His face was darkened and everything else was overbright—the skimming bird at the white fountain, the path between hyacinths, the hedge with the sun topping it.

"Hiding, Dora?"

"Oh, no." And then, flatly—anything to gain time: "Such a lovely garden."

"Yes, isn't it? But what's the matter with Mrs. Winkums? Still in the dumps? Still determined to make yourself miserable over the news of poor Estelle?"

"Don't, Horace, please." Dora's shoulders pressed hard at the slatted bench. She moistened her lips. "I didn't mean to be unreasonable at lunch, Horace," she whispered. "And I don't want to be morbid——"

She thought it would be easier to explain if he would advance upon her and sweep her off the cold, hard little bench into the warmth of his arms. But he didn't do it. He waited aloof and Jovian for Dora to finish her apology. His face was clearer now that her eyes were getting used to the direct sun. She couldn't help shrinking from the gaze Horace bent upon her. It was not that his face was unkind, not at all. Indeed, it was almost too kind. Horace looked at Dora—oh, unworthy thought—as if swelling with conscious magnanimity like—a deep-chested champion according trivial respite to a negligible, beaten foe.

"You don't want to be morbid and unreasonable? But you can't help it, Dora? You don't altogether understand your being so unlike yourself to-day, do you, Dora?" His broadly generous voice dropped to a low humming in her ears. "Poor little Dora. Poor little Dora. Waked up feeling ill. Cross as two sticks all day. I understand. I don't reproach you. And, really, I ought not to have showed you that letter. I ought to have shielded you from that shock to your nerves—at such a time——"

It was the expression on his face rather than what he said which made Dora flinch. She found his gaze somehow painful, and she looked quickly away from him. So looking through the doorway of the sheltering shrubs, she saw—or thought she saw—a stranger in their garden: a woman, just beyond the first turn of the bordered path where one corner of the white-latticed arbor showed. She was young, not much more than Dora's age, quite beautiful in an ethereal sort of way. She had a quantity of bright hair coiled at her neck—an odd anachronism that coil was in this day of the shingle bob.

When Dora looked out, the young woman with the fair, coiled hair seemed to be regarding a stalk of purple blossoms held like a proud plume upright in her hand. Dora thought she must have just received it from the Wintons' gardener, for he was not two yards beyond her, trundling his tool-laden barrow away toward the hedge.

The rattle and creak and scrunch of the gardener's wobbling wheelbarrow are to this day a part of Dora's clear memory of that woman when she looked away from her husband and so unexpectedly saw—or, for one long moment, thought she saw—the woman in her garden.

Horace had his back toward the opening in the shrubs. He did not notice Dora's slight start of surprise. He plainly hadn't the faintest idea of any one's having come into the garden after him. If any of Horace's neighbors were in the habit of entering informally through the gate in the hedge, Horace for the moment gave the fact no thought. He went right on talking to Dora as if they were secure from interruption.

That subtly disturbing solicitude for her health had given way before another topic ready to his tongue. Still aloof, he rapidly but gently mentioned to Dora the hard conditions duty im-

poses on men, regardless of tender ties. He mentioned Algiers and a mission of great importance which could be delegated to no one; a mission involving, unfortunately, nine or ten months, the best part of a year. He threw off a hint about what a good sport Dora was sure to be, and very fondly he hinted at a second honeymoon.

Perhaps Dora would have interrupted sooner than she did; but, just as she opened her lips to speak, she thought the woman out there by the arbor looked up from the hyacinth in her hand and smiled, if wistfully, still pleasantly, like an old friend. And then, as one would secretly signal a child in company, she seemed to shake her head at Dora. From side to side she shook it. It was the gesture, not of negation, as Dora first tried to think, but of commiseration. She smiled and shook her head out of pity for Dora. Although she had never seen Dora before this minute, she looked sorry for her, sorry enough to weep. It was not what Dora's husband was saying about going away that frightened Dora so intolerably. It was that look of ineffable sadness and sympathy stealing over a stranger's face. Dora sat frozen to dumbness during the creeping seconds of the moment while Horace was telling her he had undertaken a mission to Algiers.

"It'll be like getting married all over again, Mrs. Winkums, when I get back and find you strong and well——"

Only then did she interrupt him.

"I'm strong and well *now*. It's only that I can't eat chocolates——ever. I told you. And that doctor of yours, Doctor Callowell, told me so, too. Really, Horace. He said it's nothing. You mustn't be so sorry for me, Horace. You needn't mind leaving me; needn't mind so dreadfully. I'm quite well. So it's all right if you must go to Algiers for—the best part of a year. It isn't at all as if——"

And then the warmth of his big arms

sweeping her up off the cold, slatted bench, the cradling warmth of his arms, and that sweet creeping drowsiness, that almost infantile drowsiness to which his enveloping tenderness always lulled her. The overbright vista beyond him swam with golden motes. He poured wine-sweet kisses into the cup of her palm. And how he praised her! Such a good sport. He had known she'd take it like that. His brave Mrs. Winkums! Another would have wept and pleaded. But, oh, beloved, oh, small one, now that he held her in his arms again, he knew he'd been a fool to consent to Algiers. He just wouldn't go, that's all. He wouldn't. He'd tell Coates he'd reconsider. He'd make Coates go. Three kisses in her palm. Good idea. Send Coates. A kiss and a kiss and a kiss. Coates should go. Kind of a holiday for old Coates. It was rumored that Mrs. Coates was expecting again and she was notoriously shrewish at best. The breath of his laugh stirred Dora's short hair at the roots and made her shiver. She moved in his arms.

"Horace, did you think that I——"

"Hush, small one! Be still, beloved! I will not leave you. I swear it." A kiss to protest it against her pulsing throat and another on her shut eyes.

Her swooning will knocked feebly at the underside of her eyelids. They held as if glued. Oh, *let* Dora see the truth. Even if it is frightening, let her see it. Let her open her eyes and look—to see if any one can pity her now, close in his arms.

She rallied all her will to open her eyes and look again through the gap in the shrubs. The level sun was dazzling. Still, she saw beyond disputing that there was no other woman in her garden. She saw across her husband's shoulder through a mist of golden motes the bend in the bright-bordered path and one corner of the lacelike white arbor and the outer hedge, black under the flaming west. She could see almost the

whole of the small garden through the wide opening in the shrubs.

There was no visitor in their garden. There had been none. Dora had only imagined the woman with the bright hair. Already shaken by the gardener's grief, she had been completely unnerved by the news that Horace was going to leave her. Her overwrought fancy had tricked her. That was all. That was absolutely all. There was no one about but herself and her husband and a bent old gardener trundling off some rakes and hoes which rattled in a barrow creaking at its axle and crunching the pebbles in its way. Rattle and creak and scrunch. A shambling old gardener just pushing his wobbly wheelbarrow out through the gate in the hedge. When he was gone there was no one but their two selves in the length and breadth of her Eden.

Over the white bird bath against the sun wheeled and dipped a winged lover and his mate.

"Look, Horace. Look, Mr. Winkums. Aren't they dears?"

It was he who found the fallen hyacinth. Going in at dusk with his arm about Dora's waist, he came upon it lying on the ground near the corner of the arbor. The broken stalk with its dim purple bells drooped and dangling lay like a damped feather exactly in their way. But he didn't pick it up. He kept his arm about Dora's waist and put the flower aside with his foot. Cool as the wind that blows between the stars, fear blew over Dora. But why? Surely no ghostly visitant had dropped the hyacinth there. The passing barrow had mowed it down. Of course! She had seen how the wheel wobbled. And if some one Horace had once been fond of really had planted the bulbs, as the gardener had said, long, long ago, what of that? Wasn't it on the whole rather dear of Horace, keeping his arm close about Dora, to push the poor little flower out of their path?



SECOND BIRTH

IF I were dead and you should pass the way
Where I lay hidden under grass and earth,
Your steps, I think, would echo to my clay
And all my dust would quicken to new birth.

Though I had lain there long and quietly
In the still darkness with the crumbling dead,
Your buoyant tread would stir again in me
Joy in your quick laugh and your proud held head.

And I should thrust thin fingers toward the light—
Pale, tenuous fingers seeking life anew—
And little wind flowers, quivering and white,
Would edge the path I might not walk with you.

Oh, should you stride on whistling down the hill
And never know my fingers sought yours still?

ELEANOR HAMMOND.



The Grain of Mustard Seed

By Berthe K. Mellett

Author of "Tide of the Tavenners,"
"The Bacchæ," etc.

PIRATES are contemptuous beasts. Long experience with idiots who sneak into adventure for a new thrill, and then howl to high heaven when the inevitable plank is lashed into place, is not the medicine to put wholesome respect for the human race into the breasts of the Captain Kidds of these or other days. Under the gay and careless manner of a spoiled child of fortune, with which he dressed the window behind which his desperate trade was plied, the worm of utter scorn for his fellow creatures ate at the soul of Avery Macheath. Man and woman, friend and foe, he despised them all—particularly friend and woman. As he came down the last hill from the highway, picking his way over the untrodden ground of a mountain waste, he could see the red roof of the ancient mission which Fleming Hartford had reduced to a mere residence, and his jaw set hard.

Some day—and that day not so far distant—he'd get even with Hartford for the ruin of that house. A refuge it had been; a deserted, monastic spot, guiltless of tenant, empty and cool under the blazing California sun. The one pool of solitude left in a jazzing world. But Hartford, who had more money than could possibly be used decently, had found it and bought it and filled it with the suffocating upholstery of wealth; had violated its integrity of design with silver-mounted plumbing,

and outraged its silence with the inane laughter of an endless flow of guests. Fleming would never know that he had gotten even. But no man can have a perfect revenge, and secrecy was one of the penalties Macheath paid for his peculiar method of punishment.

His hatred for Fleming Hartford was no new affair, nor had the conversion of the mission so much inspired it as been its culmination. Born to the same Western social caste, Fleming had moved in the golden groove which a hard-nosed old ancestor had chipped out of the Comstock lode with a pick and shovel, while Avery had been compelled to live by his wits, prosper by his manner and appearance, and subsist on makeshifts.

Through one of those quirks which are apt to kink up in whatever psychology is forced to twist and turn too much for its own good, Avery blamed his friend for his own state. If Fleming's grandfather hadn't grabbed all the gold in California, there would have been some left for somebody else. If Fleming didn't ride his golden horse at such a gallop, others might proceed at a pace suited to their steeds. If Fleming wasn't so joyously idle, others might be content to work. If Fleming hadn't married Marianne, the world might have been spared at least one notable example of how vapid and vain and ripe for destruction a bored and beautiful woman can be. If Marianne hadn't brought

Helene Vigny forward, from goodness knows where, as her protégée—

The moment he found his mind reverting to Helene Vigny he cut his meditation short, and, bringing the battered little car in which he rode under the shelter of a live oak standing less than a mile from the Hartford house, he parked it there. Then, shaking the red dust of the Yosemite from the linen duster that he wore, he folded it with the precision which marked his care of even the least item of his wardrobe, stowed it in the back, and, taking up the heavy and many-tagged bag that had been riding on the running board, walked with it to the nearest village and hired a taxi back over the road he had come.

He smiled as he passed the spot from which he could see the green roof of the live oak. As dense and umbrella-like as a huge mushroom, it furnished not only a cover from the elements, but a screen for prying eyes. He was being very thorough and very efficient. In dealing with a woman like Helene Vigny, it was only the part of wisdom to furnish oneself with an engine of retreat. Women with eyes like that, with beautiful, fighting chins—

A niggling little temptation to leave Helene Vigny alone, to let her proceed toward her marriage with her major in the calm, sweet pride to which a girl like that was entitled, stirred in an unexplored crevice of his mind, and he caught his breath as a man might who had found his feet upon the crumbling rim of a precipice. Retreating to the safe mental ground of his necessities and his only way of meeting them, he was forcing himself to outline some sort of plan of campaign in his affair with Marianne Hartford, when suddenly the decrepit vehicle in which he was riding tipped to a precarious angle, and, spinning on two wheels, shot in between the brick piers of the gate opening upon the avenue of cottonwoods leading to the house.

The danger restored his usual manner, and he leaned genially toward the bearded, hard-bitten individual occupying the driver's seat.

"You must have driven a taxi in Paris," he remarked.

"Wells Fargo coach to Lodi," replied the other laconically, stormed into the monastic shadows that fell from the cloister of the old sun-baked building, jammed on a shrieking brake, and waited for his fare to open his own door and descend.

The Japanese who took the many-tagged bag from Macheath's hand smiled and led the way along the cloister to the wing where a room had been prepared for the newly arrived guest, conveying the information as he did so that madame and her friends were at the swimming pool below the waterfall whose murmur filled the whole drowsy afternoon world with a kind of tumultuous silence.

Macheath studied the flagstones under his feet. Fleming had taken up the old, worn ones—those whose deep-trodden cups had held pools for the birds to drink at after driving rains—and put down new squares of strange, outlandish red. Fool, spoiler, destructive cog in the machine of show and change which was ruining the world and the souls of men! Well, he'd teach the pampered, galumphing child of fortune something, anyway. He'd demonstrate that the power to ruin was not restricted to those of great wealth. That pale, driven necessity can also make rather a nifty shift at annihilation when occasion demands. He'd get rid of this business with Helene Vigny once and for all, and turn his full attention to the house of Hartford. He took a bill from his pocket, and slipped it into the willing Asiatic hand before him. Then, with comparative nonchalance:

"If you can do so without attracting attention," he said, "tell Miss Vigny that Mr. Macheath has arrived, and begs

the favor of a few words before the others have finished their bath."

Helene Vigny came almost immediately; tall, and as brown skinned as a boy in her dripping red jersey.

Every Macheath bowed and then stood back from her, his eyes upon the green hills rising higher and bluer as they mounted into the distance of the sky and faded into the white of clouds and snows.

"There is a little matter—unsettled," he said in a hard and even voice. "I have certain letters and notes of yours, written to me at a time when you honored me with your interest. You are about to be married——"

"You have said all that before." Her voice was as hard and even as his. His heart leaped a little in his breast. Combat with a woman like Helene Vigny was worth while. No weeping; no wringing of futile hands; no pleading for the preservation of a worthless self—nothing but a steady, steellike voice, and the outward thrust of a beautiful chin.

"But you do not seem to realize," Macheath continued, "that to have documents such as I mention outstanding at a time like this may prove fatal. Major Winton—may I point out—is a young man of an old school."

"You're still a rotter, aren't you, Mac?"

Though he tried to avoid the concession to her power, her eyes dragged his down to their own level, and in their brown depths he saw a bottomless pit of loathing and disgust.

"I had thought," she continued, "that there might be the mustard seed of decency even in you."

"Unfortunately, if there ever was, my bankers poured the scalding water of a notice upon it yesterday. You see, in my position, I must affect the most exclusive and fastidious bankers that the country affords. And, unfortunately, exclusive and fastidious bankers will

have nothing to do with vulgarians who cannot keep their accounts above a proletarian figure. In view of the fact that I live and dress like a Brahman, they protest—in the notice which I have now in my pocket—that they realize nothing but the urgency of my social life is at fault for my oversight of the fact that my deposit stands to-day upon the wholly inadequate feet of but four figures. They insist upon five, Helene. Now personally, I consider five figures less of a support than an accumulation. But Higgins Brothers are the doctors——"

"If I went back to the swimming pool and told Major Winton what you are saying to me now——"

"That is just it, Helene. If you became a heroine and told him, or if I were forced to sink to melodrama and show him the letters—innocent of real wrong as we know they are—they would have a very black look to eyes as puritanical as those of Major Winton. These simple, great-hearted soldiers, Helene——"

"You are making love to Marianne. Get the money from her. She has everything in the world, and I have nothing but the man I intend to marry."

"Your best friend, Helene! For shame!"

"I don't care. I don't care if she is my best friend. She's got everything, I tell you. Everything. A husband worth millions. A dozen houses as good as this one. Why, even the jewels she brought up here to wear to the bal masqué to-morrow night would sell for three times the amount you demand from me. And all I have is Marshall, and the things I stand for to him. And I intend to keep what I have."

"Bravo, Helene! Nobody in the world, not even you, has that wish more deeply at heart than myself. In view of which I will, for the inconsiderable sum of ten thousand dollars or its equivalent, and merely to keep myself in the good graces of Higgins Brothers, bank-

ers, turn over to you, without formality and immediately upon payment for the same, a whole bundle of very neatly tied epistles, as well as certain memories, both dear and tender——”

“You pig!” Sleek with the water that ran from her crimson jersey, she drew herself to her full slim height and fired the broadside of her hatred into him. “You unutterable abomination! I’ll get your money—or the equal of it. But listen to me now, because you’ll never hear the sound of my voice directed to you again. I’ll get it, and fling it in your face, and be done with you, once and forever. After this, if ever so much as your shadow crawls across my path, I’ll tell Marshall the whole thing and have him kick you out of the way. If ever you attempt to do me either hurt or kindness, I’ll shoot you as I would shoot a rabid dog, and then give myself up and take the consequences. Either hurt or kindness, remember—either hurt or kindness!”

And she turned upon her bare pink heel and was gone—back to the pool under the waterfall where the others played.

Not a tear; not a hand wrung out toward him; not a plea ding-donged in his ear! Macheath went back to his room and stared at the swimming things hung ready on the rack in his bath room. If she had pleaded; if she had wept; if she had done any of the hundred things that the women preceding her in his experience had done, he could have laughed and donned the vestments of play, and gone out to face her again, with mockery on his lips. But she had done none of the things that other women did. Instead, she had stood brown and lovely and straight before him and flung him a promise to meet his terms, like a queen flinging a poisoned sop at some foul slave, that he might creep away and die of it and relieve her eyes of him forevermore.

As though the poison were already at

its work within him, a nauseating wash of uneasiness swept his being, like the first troubling of an approaching illness. The thought of the little car under the live oak came in a wave of temptation. Why not go to it now, before the quiet of the house was shattered with laughter, and ride away? There must be some clean, big place in the world, that he had never seen before. A place where he could live without the patronage of Higgins Brothers, and thrive and purge his soul, and work——

He brought himself up with a dry inward laugh. Work? He, Avery Macheath, work? What he’d better do was to go out and smash that car before it called to him again. Then, with his single bridge burned behind him, as it were, he’d have to get down to business. There was the matter of Marianne Hartford——

Again nausea washed through him. Marianne was the weeping, pleading type—the type he knew so well—but he was so strangely weakened that he feared even her. She had big blue eyes, like a baby’s, and a mouth that seemed about to break into pathetic quivering even when she smiled. He distinctly disliked mouths that quivered, even pretty mouths.

He rose from the couch where he had thrown himself and took a book from the table beside the bed. If he looked into it, he knew what he should find. Words and phrases underlined for his benefit. He flung the book away, and a note dropped out. He might have known there would be a note. Marianne was exactly the kind that would write a note. A note so honeyed that it was only a miracle which kept it from sticking the cover of the book to the flyleaf. What a fool—what an arrant fool—laying traps for her own destruction! Well, he’d teach her a lesson so swift and cruel in its application that it ought to do for her and all the rest of woman-kind, at the same time that it brought

his balance with Higgins Brothers to a figure which would command their respect for years.

Helene had said that Marianne had everything. He was willing to concede that she had everything but gray matter, and, by the Lord Harry, he'd do his best to hammer a little of that into her blond skull. After he had performed that work of mercy he'd quit. Once and for all, he'd quit. He'd do this last job neatly and efficiently, and at its completion he'd retire from his profession. In all probability the note which had fallen to the floor from the book would be all the tool he needed for the work immediately ahead. Taking the note from the floor he opened it.

It's been such a long, long time, Mac dear, since we saw each other last—

He skipped that part.

I wanted to have you up here a week ago, but Helene raised all sorts of obstacles. Why doesn't Helene like you?

Do you know, you great big, strong man you, how your little Marianne has missed you? It seems to me that no other woman in all history ever shed so many lonely tears as I shed for you. Nobody else matters, Mac—nobody at all. Just to hear your voice, to know that when I come down to dinner you will be there at the table, to realize that on the other side of a partition wall you are thinking of me, is everything in the world. I have been reading the memoirs of Agnes Sorel—

He put the letter down. For the life of him he couldn't drive himself to read another word. Anyway, he knew what it contained—the same vapid things that a dozen women had sent him before and paid handsomely to get back afterward. It came to him to wonder angrily why he should have been cast in the part of avenging angel in the Hartford household, when such a price as reading drivel of that sort must be paid for the office. If once he could get well squared up in advance with Higgins Brothers—

The afternoon was waning. Light came through his windows and lay like gold inlay between long shadows on his

bricked floor. It was decent of Fleming to leave at least one room in the place intact, and then to give him that room. Beyond the garden voices rose into a high, clear crackle, like the snapping of cheerfully burning twigs. They sounded through the murmuring thunder of the waterfall, approached, and fell into the tempo of swift, patting feet upon the cloister floor. The bathers from the pool were coming in, calling to each other as they came. In a half hour they would be dressed and having tea, and after that there would be the usual happy idleness of doing nothing until dinner. Marianne would have her tea in her room. She always did. She was a woman of a thousand unsound theories, one of which was that she was terribly missed and longed for when she was out of sight. After she had had her tea she would nap for an hour, and after her nap she would call in her maid and plan the wardrobe details of her campaign for his complete subjugation. He knew exactly what she would wear down to dinner. Blue—something blue and lacy—as like as a twentieth-century modiste could make a gown to the garb of one of the heroines whose indiscretions it was her ambition to emulate.

Agnes Sorel, eh? The woman who had made a man out of a weakling. And Marianne Hartford thought herself like to Agnes Sorel. Well, the sooner a woman of Marianne's stamp was enlightened as to her complete incompetence for the rôle she essayed to play, the better for every one concerned. Unfortunately for her informant, it would be rather like striking a child across its wide, blue eyes, to say the things to Marianne Hartford that had to be said, if her soul were to be saved and Higgins Brothers permanently pacified. However, when a disagreeable job loomed ahead the thing to do was to get at it and see it finished.

Squeezing such bitter consolation from the situation as he could, Avery

Macheath rang for the Japanese servant, and in the interval before the Oriental responded to his summons, he set the bag with the many tags on it upon the rack at the foot of his bed, unlocked it, and started to thrust the note from Marianne Hartford under tape binding together a thin packet of letters. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't parcel the maunderings of a Marianne along with the fine, clean statements of an Helene. Putting the note into a pocket by itself, he was about to lock the bag again when a dark and wrinkled garment, carelessly wadded together, caught his eye. He hauled it out and held it toward the Japanese, who had just come in.

"Have it pressed before the dance tomorrow night," he said as the long folds of a monk's frock unrolled themselves. "I am going to wear it then."

His trunk had preceded him and been unpacked. Deftly the Japanese went about the business of running water in the tub, laying out tie and collar, fitting buttons, moving so quietly and smoothly about the room that Macheath started when he heard his voice.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"Much pardon," the Oriental replied. "I cry out at the pearls of the links of the cuffs. Such very fine of extreme luster. I take one more shirt—maybe. This one too much buttonhole and unsafe for so fine pearls in the cuffs, yis?"

"It's all right. Put it in and get out, will you? I want to be alone. And don't forget to take the cassock thing along with you and get it pressed."

"Yis, thank," and the Japanese was gone.

Macheath thought hard and systematically as he finished his dressing. Afterward he stood for a long time at the window looking out as the soft gray of evening settled over the garden. A gentle place, it was. Lovely even in the opulent resurrection which Fleming had wrought upon it. Through the palms

there, like a close and tinkling echo of the waterfall above, a fountain played. Birds drank at the fountain, and above them stood tall, tawny lilies, their centers as deep and brown as the eyes of Helene.

He turned from the window, yanking his mind back into the path he wished it to go. The drawing-room of the house faced the other way—undoubtedly the old assembly room had been chosen for that. The others, with the exception of Marianne, would be there. A new wing had been built onto the house. He had noted it resentfully upon his arrival. An anachronistic wing with Louis Quinze windows and little balconies. It required scant Sherlocking to deduce that that wing was Marianne's.

He stepped over the thick ledge of his own window, followed a flagged path to the wing, lifted himself over the rail of one of the balconies, and pushed at the loosely closed window.

Marianne was putting something into an opened safe in the wall, a black japanned box too long for the receptacle that had been provided for it.

"I think we will have to take these out of the box, Celeste," she said, feeling a presence behind her and mistaking it for that of her maid. "The safe door will never close."

Then, suddenly sensing that it was not Celeste who stood looking on, she dragged a covering across the opening and turned.

The cry with which she came to Macheath was as lacy and saccharine as the room into which he had stepped. Never before, through long years of hard driving, had his nerves warned him that their docility might be spent. But now he knew that mutiny was fermenting. Looking for something to rouse his anger against her and stiffen him to the encounter which he faced, his eyes fastened upon the covering before the wall safe. Blandly disregarding of the great suitabilities which rule less spoiled mor-

tals, Marianne had not only hung her walls with azure brocade, but over the brocade, as a screen for the face of the safe, and between a Watteau and a Fragonard, she had caused a rug to be suspended. A thing of tender, faded loveliness it was, designed for the prayers of a sultana, its pattern picked out with stones, a fringe of tiny turquoise dripping from the veins of color that bordered it. The value of the thing, and its outrageous misplacement, steadied Macheath. Not that he envied Marianne or any one else a prayer rug sewn with gems. Such a penitential carpet, calculated to etch fantastic designs upon contrite knees, had no appeal for him. But it symbolized and summarized the inchoate thoughts with which he had come. To pay for her sin of silliness, Marianne should hand over to him the value of that single article of the furnishing of her room, and well he knew that the sum would be a princely one.

"But Mac"—she was purring her admonition like a kitten—"you shouldn't have come here. Don't you know that this is my ownest, own little room, and that nobody comes without knocking twice, and then asking if they may, in their prettiest voice? Celeste has——"

For an answer he passed her and shot the gilt-and-enamel bolt upon her door.

"Mac!" she screamed softly and delightedly. "You're the most terriblest great big man——"

To keep himself between her and the door, and also to gauge by weight the ransom upon which he had decided, he moved over to the prayer rug and lifted the fringe in his hands. There were sapphires sewn into the pattern above, and a brown topaz, like the center of the lilies around the fountain—like Helene's eyes.

He jerked his hand down across the incrustated surface, and the fringe of turquoise caught in a button on his sleeve—a shower of tiny stones falling from the broken thread.

"Sorry!" He spoke wearily and without stooping to retrieve the fallen jewels.

"Never mind. Celeste will fix it better than new again. And now my great big man must go. If Fleming should come to the door and knock——"

"It's unnecessary for Fleming or anybody else to come to the door." He put down the hands that she reached toward him, and, holding her before him, looked her squarely in the eye.

"Why, Mac—why—you're so strange, dear!"

"Am I?"

"You're laughing at me." Her mouth puckered at the corners, and her eyes widened as though about to empty themselves of tears. "I don't know what you're laughing at me about, but I think it's extremely unpleasant——"

"I am not laughing at you, and I am not unpleasant. I am about to do you a service. I am about to teach you not to think you are a heroine out of a questionable French book—not an Agnes Sorel nor a Du Barry nor any other woman who had brains enough to get away with things that you couldn't get away with if you lived to be a hundred. Don't you know you shouldn't write silly letters to men and put them in the fronts of sillier books——"

"Why, Mac, I did it because——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't try to tell me why you did it. I know. You're bored. You've taken a beautiful old retreat in the woods and turned it into a kind of society bear pit, and still you're bored. The only thing you can think of to do next, is to make a fool of Fleming through his oldest friend.

"I'm at one with you in the matter of putting something over on Fleming. There are a few scores I'd like to settle with him myself. But what I do resent is your assumption that you interest me."

"Mac, dear—Mac! What are you saying? Let go my hands—you're hurt-

ing me. You're digging my rings into my fingers!"

He dropped her hands and turned to the prayer rug again. It steadied him and brought his scattered thoughts into design.

"The long and short of it is," he resumed, "that I have that fool note you wrote me, and that, partly because you need a lesson, and partly because I need money, I will consider returning it to you for—shall we say the price of that rug hanging there?"

"You're laughing at me! It's one of those horrid jokes that people at house parties think they always have to work up! I hate jokes. I hate the people who play jokes. I wish you'd be sweet to me."

Tears were falling from her eyes now, plowing unsightly furrows down the delicate powdering of her cheeks.

"Stop it! Stop it, I say!" In his nervousness he gripped her shoulders and shook her until her tears retreated and her quivering mouth froze into a rigid pucker. "I'm not playing a joke; I'm playing the part of tutor to you and wealthy uncle to myself. I want money, and God knows you want teaching. You wrote a note that the average man would interpret in but one way. I don't choose to interpret it at all. But Fleming would be an entirely different kettle of fish for you to manage, young lady. And I may as well inform you that I've not decided yet whether to let you ransom that fool epistle, or to let it get into Fleming's hands. I'm rather fed up with watching Dame Trouble side-step the golden youth and bump into the rest of the world. I rather fancy steering her straight into his course for once—"

Marianne began to laugh softly and to pat the hair that his shaking hand displaced.

"You frightened me, you great big man, you. But now I see that you are only jealous of Fleming. And really I'd

be disappointed if you weren't. I even like to have you shake me the way you did——"

"Wha—what?" Now it was his mouth that hung aghast, his mind that refused to function.

"Because it shows that you really and truly care—care fearfully. And it gives me a thrill that nothing else could give."

"Good heavens, I've heard about dumb-bells——"

With his hand behind him he fumbled at the bolt of the door and let himself out into the hall. At the far end of the corridor a shadow moved, accompanied by the ghost of a monk's frock hung to a coat hanger and held high off the floor. The Jap had been back with the pressed garment, and finding the door fastened, had gone away again. Dimly Macheath knew he should summon him back, but his mentality had sagged too far under its recent jolt for even that effort. The Jap would either bring the thing back again, or hang it in the general cloak-room. At any rate, nothing mattered, except to get away and think for a while over the astonishing problem of Marianne. She couldn't be taught—that was the long and short of it. She'd be as big a fool after no matter what blow, as she was now. Nothing remained but to vent one's impatience against her upon Fleming.

In his own room Macheath found that one of his cuff links was gone. The Jap had warned him. Never mind, it would turn up somewhere. Still preoccupied, he took another from his dressing case and fitted it into the gaping holes. The pearls didn't match, but it was too much trouble to change the other.

Still muddling about with the amazing problem of Marianne, he went to dinner. Once it occurred to him to take violent offense at the unctuous, noisy meal, served at the same table where a quiet brotherhood had broken fast over bowls of bread and milk, and he felt momentarily enspirited. Once he looked at

Helene. She talked over him and around him and past him, but never so much as a flicker of her eye came in his direction. She was a fool, too. As big a fool as Marianne. She thought to meet her difficulty with him by the simple process of eliminating him from her consciousness. Well, maybe she could. After all, a man who was anything of a man didn't blackmail women like Helene. He'd burn those letters of hers and present her with the ashes.

As soon as he could decently escape from his fellow guests he went out into the garden and lighted a cigarette. When that was gone he lighted another. They were playing bridge inside. Now and then he caught the clear, high bell of Helene's laughter. He got up from the stone bench on which he had been sitting, moved into the shrubbery behind it, and stood watching her. Light shone down upon her sleek dark head and made little burning candles of the sequins on her white gown. His soul went out of the realm of his mind, and kissed the hem of that chastely glittering gown.

"While Marshall's playing the dummy," he heard her say. "I'll go out and get a breath of air."

He drew back farther into the shrubbery. Hurt or kindness, she had said. She would spurn him for either hurt or kindness. He'd have to send those ashes—in a packet—by the Jap.

She left the drawing-room, and almost immediately he saw her emerge from the cloakroom beyond it. Rather, he surmised it was Helene, though her whole figure was wrapped in a long, dark cloak, and the cowl of a friar's frock was over her head. A car stood in the driveway, ready for whatever night jaunt might suggest itself to Fleming Hartford or his guests, and, reaching over one of the doors of that, she extracted something from the pocket, and darted away on feet as silent and swift as the feet of a shadow.

A kind of panic took Macheath. Whatever business Helene was upon, it was desperate business. But he dared not speak to her, or attempt to deter her. Hurt or kindness, she had said—hurt or kindness. Watching her, following through the shrubbery on feet as swift and silent as her own, he came with her and halted opposite the balcony giving on Marianne's windows.

Helene was over the balcony, and with the thing she had taken from the car was levering the closed windows. They gave way with a little creaking sound, and Helene was lost in the emptiness of the darkened room beyond.

He knew the errand she was upon—now. She had said she would give him the equal of the money he had demanded, and she had said that Marianne's jewels more than equaled that sum. He might have called to her and frightened her from her mission, but a terrible cowardice took him. Others might hear his call and find Helene at her work. He might have slipped through the window behind her, but at his touch she would cry out and bring down destruction upon herself. There must be some way—Then, before he could formulate a plan, she was back through the window again, a long box under her arm, running with it toward the lights that lay through the drawing-room windows upon the grass.

"Helene," he whispered. "Helene!" But before coming to the lights she stopped and slipped the monk's gown from her, bundled it around the box she carried, and, lifting the vines which grew over a stone box beside the garden path, she stowed it under their dense cover.

"What did you do with my hand, Marshall?" she called, and stepped back into the lighted room. Her head was high, her voice vibrant. She had been gone barely the time it took to play a hand of bridge. "It's wonderful outdoors. What do you want to sit in here

for, playing stuffy cards, when the night outside is as white as milk?"

"Listen to old Helene," some one called. "Marshall's gone and made her a pot of money while she smoked a cigarette, and now she wants to quit."

"Oh, is that so?" she flung back. "Well, to prove that you are wrong as usual——" And she picked up the hand that had been dealt to her.

Carefully, as cautiously as a burglar over a net of alarm wires, Macheath approached the box over which the vines fell. By quick work he could restore Marianne's jewels before another dummy hand was dealt and Helene came back again to hide the box in a safer place. He had almost reached it, when something struck against his foot. Stooping down, he picked up a screw driver. He was about to fling it from him, when he heard a rustling sound behind him, and, jamming it into his pocket, he turned.

Marianne, all lacy and pale in the moonlight, was drifting toward him.

"I don't think, just because you've got the sulks over Fleming, you ought to treat me as though I had the measles," she pouted. And, sitting down on the rim of the stone box, she patted a place beside her in invitation to him.

"Come away from there! I mean, it's better down by the fountain."

She yielded her slim wrist into his grasp and followed after him, laughing in delighted giggles.

"Ooh! What a hurry the great big man is in to get little Marianne away."

"See here!" He plumped her down forcefully on a seat beside the purling fountain. "You stay where you are. Do you hear me? You stay where you are, and don't you move. I've got something to do."

"Ooh! Kiss Marianne's wrist—Marianne's poor little wrist that got all hurt with the big man's strong, strong hands."

She held the fragile member up to-

ward him, and suddenly he felt very weak and sick. Baffled by her inanity, he knew no way to turn.

"Look here, Marianne," he tried again, "if I tell you that I've got something important to do, something so important that it means more than life to me, will you cut out the baby talk for ten minutes and stay here until I come back? I give you my word, I'll let you go on being an idiot to the end of your days, if you'll just do that."

"But I want to see what you're going to do. I just love to watch you."

He strode away from her, and heard the light silken wings of her dress in pursuit behind him.

"Go back," he ordered. "I tell you to go back."

And then his voice died. Along the garden path he saw Fleming coming toward them, his large, loose frame hunched forward with haste.

"Hello!" he called in the manner of one who directs his voice to but one person. "Mac, old chap, you there? Come along with me, will you? Stay where you are, Marianne."

"Nobody seems to want me," Marianne pouted. "All right, I'll stay where I am, and next time you can beg as much as you like, and I won't come."

"Mac"—Fleming propelled the other out of earshot of the piqued woman and hurried him along the garden path to the new wing of the house—"no need to call out the guard, but Marianne's safe's been entered and a lot of junk she brought along for to-morrow's shindig lifted. You and Major Winton are the only ones on. Celeste came running to me just now, so it's not her. Winton's got the Japs corraled in the wine cellar and is getting the Stockton police on the phone. They'll beat it up here in a couple of hours in machines. But it doesn't look to me like a job by one of the servants. The window's been jimmed from the outside—looks like it had been done with a hairpin. See?"

He had lifted himself over the little balcony and now he trained a flash lamp on the window. There was a tiny mark. Macheath's eyes slid away from the indentation. Its very minuteness had something desperate and pathetic in it.

"Hadn't we better go inside?" he asked, praying for something less revealing there.

Inside the room Fleming drew heavy folds of brocade across the windows to shut out prying eyes and switched on a flood of light. The prayer rug lay in a heap on the floor. Above it the safe door gaped open.

"See!" Fleming's tone was so triumphant as to be joyful, and he stood back from the havoc judicially, the better to make deductions. "This was neither an inside nor an outside job. I mean to say that no servant would have pulled down the rug nor have left the safe door open. He'd have put things back as they were to give him more time to make his get-away before the loss was discovered. And any regular thief worthy of his job would have snatched the rug, seeing it's worth more than the whole caboodle that was in the safe."

"The rug—oh, yes, the rug." Some memory of the rug, some plan he had entertained regarding it, reverberated in Macheath's mind. But he couldn't remember clearly. His whole thought was around Helene, searching this way and that for her escape. "You mean, that a regular thief or a servant—" he ventured.

"Well, I hate to think what I do. But I have to. It strikes me as the work of somebody in the house—a guest, I mean. We—I suppose it's the penalty we pay, we poor dubs with money—but we are early brought to realize that it isn't merely our society our so-called friends are after."

"But—"

"Well, it comes down to who was in the drawing-room this evening, and who wasn't. You were in the garden, but I

could see the end of your cigarette for the whole time until Helene— By George!"

"What are you talking about? Until Helene—"

"Why, look here—Helene made that play about getting some fresh air. Now, she's getting ready to marry Winton and beat it to the Philippines. She hasn't got a sou to her name, but she's proud as the devil, and probably wants to have something to sport before his eyes to prove he married a personage. Anybody could steal the crown jewels of England and wear them in the Philippines, and nobody would be the wiser. Colony stuff, you know. The world left behind. Winton's not in on it, of course. Too damned uncompromising about even the little irregularities that the rest of us think are funny. That boy's a Pilgrim Father—"

"I took the jewels." Macheath's legs and back and mind stiffened. He stood square on his feet and faced his host.

"You! Why, I'd as soon believe it was—"

"No matter what you'd as soon believe. I took them."

"Now, look here, Mac, old man"—Fleming came toward him and put his hand upon his shoulder—"no hero stuff. Just because you're soft on Helene— By George, I have it! Regular best-seller plot. Your cigarette went out as soon as Helene stepped into the garden to-night. You saw her, and, being sweet on her— Don't think I haven't seen you look at Helene, old-timer, and don't think I'm too dumb to know what it means when a man looks at a woman as you look at Helene. It means: 'My soul is under your high heels, madame; will you kindly walk upon it and grind it into the ground?' Why, if Marianne should blow up the bank and kill my grandmother who was clipping coupons in the little private room she keeps for that purpose, I'd do just as you are doing now. I'd say I was the boy that got the

dynamite and touched the fuse, and that after the job was done I rushed in and strewed the old lady's remains around promiscuously, just to make the crime complete."

"You—you feel that way about Marianne?"

"That way, and more."

"I—I had a plan—something to do with that rug there—but that's all past. Tell Marianne that I took the jewels, will you? She ought to know. She ought to be made to realize that she has the finest thing in the world and must safeguard it."

"But you didn't take them——"

"I tell you I did."

"I tell you you didn't."

Macheath's right hand shot up in a gesture of despair, and his eye caught the dull sheen of the ill-matched pearls in his cuff.

"If you don't think I took them—if you can't be made to believe by other means, I'll have to offer you proof. Look there at the rug, in the litter of little stones from the torn fringe. See if you don't find a cuff link to match this."

He thrust his left arm close to his friend's face.

"My God, Mac—why?" Fleming rose unsteadily, the pearl link in his hand. "But you didn't—there's a mistake. You came in and tried to stop her——" Almost pleadingly he waited for Macheath to vindicate himself.

"I did, eh? Well, look here—look at this that I have in my pocket. Fit it into the mark on the window and see if it doesn't jibe. I took it out of your car standing in the driveway, and was going to put it back when Marianne came along. If that isn't evidence enough, send some one out to a live oak standing back from the road about a mile from here. There's a car there—a car that I brought to provide myself with means for a quick get-away. And, if you still doubt the truth of what I am trying to

hammer into the solid ivory of your head, go get the jewels themselves. They're in a black box, wrapped in the monk's frock that I brought to wear at the fool dance you were planning for to-morrow night, and they are stowed under the vines in the stone box just west of the drawing-room windows. Go get them—go piece the whole rotten thing together—and when you've done it, you still won't think half as badly of me as I deserve."

The two men stood for a long moment, staring at each other. Then Fleming Hartford spoke:

"You say you've got a car out under the oak tree. Winton's still with the Japs in the wine cellar, and you can be lost in the mountains before the police from Stockton arrive. If you need any money——"

"Thanks. I don't need anything. I've got that little car, and the world is wide."

"Good-by, Mac."

"Good-by, Fleming."

Through the leaves of the live oak he could see the stars. Helene had been singing when he left the house, her voice thinning and thinning as he left it, then strengthening and strengthening as vibration ceased and memory, insistent, began.

He opened the heavy bag he had carried from the house, took out a packet of letters, and, without untying the tape that bound them, made a little fire under the oak. When their flame was spent he lighted a lesser blaze, holding a single envelope between thumb and finger until it was consumed. Then, settling the heavy bag into the rack on the running board of the car, he set his foot upon the starter and threw in the clutch.

A grain of mustard seed—Helene had said something about a grain of mustard seed——

Behind him, under the live oak, wind stirred in a little heap of ashes.



The Volunteer Plot

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The Message of Ginevra,"
"The Mystery at Xanadu," etc.



SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE.

Elizabeth Hope and Lance Frazer, seeking adventure, wandered one day into the grounds of an apparently deserted mansion, and, urged on by a spirit of deviltry, rang the bell. To their amazement, the door was opened by an aged man, who greeted them civilly and asked them to step in. In the library they were met by two men of sinister aspect who declared that they recognized in Lance a certain "Mac"—who, they said, had double crossed them—trussed him firmly hand and foot, and threatened to force him to disclose to them some information they sought. Elizabeth, desperate with fear for Lance's safety, they escorted politely but firmly out of the house, and left her, a prey to terrible imaginings, outside the locked doors.

IT was not clear thought, in the least, which prompted Elizabeth's next step. It was pure chance, or, rather, it was her acceptance, impetuously and without reflection, of the opportunity which chance flicked in her way. Psychologists will admit, if you press them, that sometimes, out of the tempest of emotion, a lightning flash will emerge and do the work of thought; actually do it more efficiently. Later, the subject of such an impulse is apt to plume himself, and call it inspiration.

Therefore, in another moment, Elizabeth, crouching under damp boughs, with the despair of inaction in her heart, suddenly straightened, and, with a sinuous, three-piece movement as unconsciously graceful as that of a juvenile tree cat, hurled herself into the path again. She stood there, arms extended to block the withdrawal of the figure which had emerged cautiously from the house door. It was the old man—the white-haired old creature who had impressed her as the only possible source of succor in this dreadful house. In

the dim luster of the night, thrown back from the polished leaves of laurel bushes, he was more ethereal and wraith-like than before. A figure out of Poe, and, this time, the Poe atmosphere was not of the cheap variety.

"Oh," he said piteously, his transparent palms rising in futile entreaty, "are you still here, miss? Why—why won't you go before the trouble begins?"

And with his speech, with one word of it, Elizabeth, in the midst of her turmoil, felt an amazing clearing of the air. He was not the scholarly, mysterious personage whom she had fancied him, who must be approached with infinite delicacy; he was a servant who might be ordered about. The reason of the unreality she had felt in him came from trying to place him where he did not belong. She understood him now. He was an old butler or valet, promoted to caretaker, who thought of himself as an employe who could leave off the deferential address demanded of his former class; but a sudden encounter like this one shocked his old habits alive again.

For sheer relief Elizabeth could have laughed. Oh, the powerful chains of custom! She wasn't afraid of the impressive old creature any longer; she could issue her commands without embarrassment to either. Perhaps—blissful thought!—she could even bribe this old-fashioned portrait of a ghost.

She unclasped her wrist watch, slipped off her rings, fumbled for her purse, and held the collection out with a masterful gesture.

"Take these, please," she said, tempering the masterfulness with her most imploring tone. "I'll give you more when I get away, but now won't you try to—help my friend out of the house, or, at least, smuggle me inside where I can hear what's going on?"

The old man recoiled.

"Oh, miss, I couldn't; indeed I couldn't," he expostulated in a shocked treble. "I don't want your jewelry. I'd do what I could without that. Besides—I don't like it. That's a sapphire, isn't it? They bring bad luck to this family. All the trouble started with one, I've heard."

It was the second time that he had used the word trouble, and Elizabeth checked the importunity of her heart, to heed the murmur of prudence. Here was a gleam, a chance of finding out the reason, the hidden meaning, of the situation. There was a dreadful silence in the house. What might they not be doing to Lance? But couldn't she help him better—more intelligently, as poor Elizabeth, with the madness of hurry in her blood, put it to herself—if she could seize on a clew, a hint to guide herself by?

"What is your name?" she asked abruptly. In her curious alternation of common sense with panic, she had remembered that most people, except temperamentalists, who enjoy disguises, trust you more when you know who they are, when they have made their own particular niche clear.

"Garron, miss."

"Whose house is this? I supposed it was yours."

The bit of flattery worked.

"Oh, no, miss. It belonged to Mr. Owen's father, old Mr. Brangwyn. I well remember the battles he and the architect had over it, but the old gentleman would have his way; he was like *him* there, in that." A jerk of the chin in the direction of the house. "When he died Mr. Owen shut the place up. Too quiet for him; though he used to say, jokinglike, that he'd open it when he married. But he married abroad, in England, and none too happily, I'm grieved to say. I've looked after the place all these years."

"It must have been very lonely for you," Elizabeth encouraged. She was learning things which might be important.

"Well, some have to be lonely." Garron unveiled his philosophy of life. "A handsome place has to be looked after." Nothing could have emphasized his attitude of old retainer more clearly than his acquiescence in a situation which absorbed him, in order that the property of his master might persist. It was medieval. "I kept the house swept and repairs when necessary, but the grounds sort of got away from me. *He* noticed that first off. Well, it will all be very different now." He ceased on a sigh, as though the coming of new things, even improving and brightening things, were a burden.

Elizabeth's patience reached the breaking point. She broke out, damping his evident intention to acquaint her with the entire account of his stewardship. "Oh, can't you do anything? You don't want him hurt! You don't look hard and cruel, like those men in there—you look kind. I'll do anything in the world in return. My people are rich, and I have some money of my own. And I'd never give you away, never. Can't you get him out?"

He shook his head compassionately. "Not a chance of that, miss. From what I've caught, Mr. Owen's planned too long, and is too much in earnest. He sees through any trick, and there'd be no use pleading with him; none at all. He was like that from a boy. Many's the time I've heard him arguing with his father, and it ended in the old gentleman's giving in, and he had a will of his own, as I told you. I couldn't turn Mr. Owen now."

A thought like the hot glimmer of a spark kindled in the back of Elizabeth's mind, but she covered it.

"That tall man in there——"

"Mr. Owen—yes, miss."

"He was expecting some one, some one you took us for. Who was it? Did you know that your master was plotting to entrap the man he's torturing? He may be the wrong man. We're strangers here."

The aged voice whistled in its protesting anxiety.

"Not torture, miss—don't call it that. All he wants is some information. As soon as he gets that he'll let the gentleman go—I hope," he added weakly.

"And," pursued the girl ruthlessly, "suppose the gentleman is so disobliging as to refuse to hand over the information? Do you suppose that your master, with the charming, gentle character you so graphically describe, is going to stop at anything?"

The old man ignored this, as leading him into paths he dreaded to follow.

"No, miss, I took you for somebody quite different, though I hadn't expected the lady so soon, nor yet at night. Though I know the habits of professional people are—are unusual, in regard to hours," he trailed off vaguely. "I thought you were the lady——" The belated realization that he was retailing family intimacies to a very recent acquaintance pulled him up. "A lady in whom Mr. Owen is very much interested. I took the gentleman for one of

her family, maybe, who'd come to escort her."

The implications beat on the outside of Elizabeth's brain. Ladies who kept nocturnal rendezvous, escorted by members of their families, in lonely country mansions—— She was too busy to follow that trail. She found herself speaking in the sweet, singing tones of a tragic operatic contralto, her own intonations astonishing her:

"Garron, I am a lady in whom Mr. Brangwyn is very much interested. Please, please, manage to make him come to me! Let me see him, just once more."

Old Garron peered at the suppliant, swaying toward him in the starlight.

"I'll do my best," he said compassionately. "I can see you're in sad distress, miss. I hate this business as much as you do, in a manner of speaking. You wait till I see whether the side door's still unlocked." As he disappeared around the side of the building, on a noiseless path of turf, Elizabeth drew a long breath. The way was opening. Then her fingers clawed each other. Garron's head again popped out of the runway of shadow like an elderly and very-much-chastened faun's.

"Tell me this, miss," he asked in a piercing whisper. "You're not the other one, are you? His wife—or his wife as was—from the other side, are you?"

"I'm nobody's wife," hissed Elizabeth. Would he never go? He was going, however. No doubt there had occurred to him the advisability of letting his master dispose of this importunate female, before the not-impossible arrival of the other—the "lady in whom he was very much interested."

Elizabeth found herself, now that things were moving, foolishly nerveless. She subsided against the edge of the porch, in the shade. What came next? The spark in the back of her mind smoldered up. All the while she had been chafing against Garron's talka-

tiveness, it had been branding its question. What would she do for Lance? Her unreasonable feminine loyalty had persuaded her by this time that their presence here was altogether her fault. By her preposterous insistence on some unimaginable new plot for a story, she had egged him on; she had instigated this wild excursion, this following the spirit in the feet. It was to lead them to what they most wanted and needed; he had trusted it to do just that. Well, you got out of the world what you put into it. Perhaps, if she had given herself over to the right impulse, it might have sailed them into some marvelous harbor; but she had treated the affair like a flippant lark, and it had shipwrecked them. What were those men doing to Lance? She strained toward the dark bulk from which, at last, sounds were coming—muffled sounds, around a corner, as though a door had been opened. Anything was better than that stupid, menacing stillness.

What would she do for Lance? What ought she to do? She shut her eyes tight, and the darkness answered her—anything, anything! Her first duty, the duty that took precedence of any obligation, any decency, any point of honor in the world, was to save him. If she failed in that, through any fastidious cowardice, she could never again meet her own face in the mirror, clear-eyed, unblushing. No matter who or what Lance was or had been, he was—Lance. It was enough. Lance was Lance.

That man, Owen Brangwyn, was interested in her. She deliberately clung to Garron's prim phrase. His look, his touch, had been unmistakable. No matter what other woman he may have been expecting, he had put her aside into the faintly lighted periphery of his mind, and had given the center to her, Elizabeth. She knew what an enormous advantage the woman on the spot has over the woman at a distance. She remembered the cynical philosophy of an old

man of letters whom she knew, that the average man, no matter how much in love he may be with one girl, is perfectly willing to flirt with any other attractive houri who'll give him the chance.

If she could see Owen Brangwyn again—

As she leaned into the shadow, her fingers over her eyelids, a picture floated up through the dark, the picture of a woman moving with a sliding, catlike tread, away from a straight, motionless figure prone on the floor. Who was it? The walk was like a breath held in terror. La Tosca? Or some other who, like her, had saved her lover from torture by bargaining with his rival, very terribly; and very terribly had got out of keeping the bargain?

Only, Lance was not her lover. He was—what—what was he? No time to puzzle that out now. The immediate, pressing necessity was to rescue him. By any means—any means.

"Oh, coward, coward," moaned Elizabeth to her cringing soul. "You wouldn't be the first girl to kill a man, not by a long shot. Oh, and I've always hated to kill flies, even." She opened her eyes and clearly, grimly, issued her orders to herself. "Your duty in life is to save Lance," said Elizabeth, her will sliding into place.

"Are you ready, miss?" came the sibilant old voice she waited for. "Right around here. I've managed to open that French window, in the room back of the library where they're still sitting, and switch out the lamp there. If you hide in the window curtain—"

"What's that?" she asked, pointing to a thin ribbon of gray that branched at right angles near the window.

"That runs near the old greenhouses and strikes the drive a good bit nearer the gates. In here, miss. After a while I'll try to get Mr. Owen quietly, so you can talk with him. But for Heaven's sake, don't make a noise."

"I'll never forget this, Garron," said Elizabeth chokingly. The choke came mostly from emotion, but partly from the soft, stuffy folds of ancient damask in which he enveloped her. It was dark in the little room, the same room from which the two men had emerged, when they had made her nightmare come true by entering the library. The only light came through the tall, shining crack of the door.

Later, when Elizabeth tried to put her experience into order, her memories seemed to come in sections with little continuity. The Tosca scene was quite as real as the wait in the garden. Now another keenly defined fragment began.

By craning forward she could see nothing, so after a little she undraped the curtains from her person and ventured into the middle of the floor, accomplishing a view into the library. Brangwyn's back was turned toward her, the line of his shoulders like a barrier, over which she saw Lance. He was sitting in a straight chair, and in a second she realized that his upright and immobile attitude came from the circumstance that he was neatly tied there, by curtain ropes passed around his body. The gargoyle stood behind him, regarding him as a man contemplates a good job. Elizabeth shrank back; she felt that the creature's gimlet eyes had only to lift themselves to see her standing there in the dark.

"Devilish unreasonable of you to force me to do this," Brangwyn was grumbling. "You could avoid it by giving your word not to make a dash out if you got the chance."

"I should certainly dash," responded Lance pleasantly.

"Though why I should trust your word in any case, God knows," the other went on.

"Or I yours," Lance retorted.

The tall man sprang to his feet.

"If you weren't tied up I'd knock you down for that."

"Untie me," Lance suggested. "You're not the only one that would enjoy settling it that way."

Brangwyn took his seat again. The girl could see the big knuckles on his fist work, but he said with forced calm:

"The trouble is, that wouldn't settle it. The only thing that will settle it is for you to tell me the truth."

A peculiarly sweet and mulish look arranged itself around Lance's mouth, and the heart of Elizabeth sank. Never had she succeeded in getting beyond the moat, portcullis, barred gates, and inner fortifications which this look represented. That he had no intention of telling the truth was blatantly evident.

"For the last time," asked Brangwyn in his voice of controlled fury, "where is the Bevan sapphire?"

The listener put her hand swiftly over her lips. She had all but cried out. So that was it. The Bevan sapphire, which had disappeared two years ago, as the press had informed the world to the best of its ability. Though neither so large as the Hope diamond nor able to boast of so picturesque a history, the Bevan sapphire was one of the recognized treasures of the earth. And Garron had said that all the trouble in this family had started over a sapphire.

"Button, button, who's got the button?" repeated Lance airily. "As I have assured you several times, I haven't got it and never have had it. As the statesmen say when they get caught wandering in devious financial paths, I have no further statement to make at present."

"You know where it is."

"After two years? It may have been moved," suggested Lance.

Elizabeth was near enough the slit in the door to see the back of Brangwyn's neck turn a dull brick color.

"What do you mean by that?" he shouted.

"Only, why don't you ask—some one else?"

The speech seemed about to knock the props away from Brangwyn's self-control. As he stood over Lance, his next logical movement threatened to be a blow. Then he nodded curtly to the gargoyle.

"Get out. Wait in the hall, and wait out of hearing, d'y'e understand?"

The gargoyle understood. He slid out of sight.

Lance glanced up into the congested face bending over him and smiled.

"At last we are alone," he said softly.

"Exactly. And now you'll answer me another question, one infinitely more important to me than the whereabouts of the sapphire. You'll tell me the truth about this, if I have to wring it out of you. What *was* the truth about that night? Why did Hilda Beresford meet you in that God-forsaken, out-of-the-way Florida town, where you couldn't possibly have had any legitimate business? How did you happen to be driving over the country with her? What are you conspiring against her, anyway?"

The sapphire faded into insignificance. The mention of Hilda Beresford was not a surprise to Elizabeth—it was the famous English actress from whom the stone had been stolen—but what had Lance to do with her? What were all the gems of Ophir or of Ind in comparison with this question which was racking Brangwyn's mind as well as her own?

The name was as familiar as the front page of metropolitan dailies could make it, though Elizabeth had never seen the Englishwoman on the boards. None of the dramatic critics had yet forgotten the American tour, two years before; when they wanted to apply the measure of scathing comparisons they were apt to advise native aspirants to study the technique and more especially the direct and sincere approach of Hilda Beresford, instead of choosing the easier path of the crude heart clutch. She was

about to give another series of plays in New York, as soon as her Canadian engagement was at an end, and the press was already preparing the public mind for her arrival.

Over Lance's countenance came an expression that was a reflection of the ferocity which confronted him.

"What the devil is that to you?" he demanded. "What right have you to question Miss Beresford's actions? If she lost the stone——"

"She accepted it from me. If you know so much, you must know that. As for my right, I have every right in the world. Oh, dash it all, Garron, what do you want? Why can't you keep out of here?"

The gargoyle, on leaving the room, had drawn together behind him the two wings of the folding door. Now, following a timid knock, these wings opened, and in the crack appeared the thin countenance of the old man. Under the blast that greeted it, it palpably threatened to fade out, to Elizabeth's nervous apprehension.

"Oh, good old Garron," she breathed. This was what he had promised to do; to draw Brangwyn to her, so that she might make some kind of terms with him. Garron glanced piteously at the man bound to the chair, then determinedly did not notice him, just as he would have ignored any other feature which was not generally found in drawing-rooms.

"If you please, Mr. Owen," he faltered, "I supposed you would wish to be informed. There's the noise of a motor car, coming up the drive, sir. Perhaps the lady——"

"I'll come," said Brangwyn shortly. He called a word into the hall. Lance spoke into the confusion with urgency.

"Don't leave me with that pet of yours. I'm scared of him. He might take a fancy to try some of his experiments on my muscles while we're undisturbed."

Brangwyn threw him a glance of contempt.

"Well, you can't get away, anyhow," he observed, with one last sneer through the narrowing sides of the folding door as he drew them together. His footsteps rang on the hard-wood floor of the hall beyond the red rug.

The instant the coast was clear Elizabeth was in the library. Her hand closed over Lance's mouth before he could open it.

"Oh, come, come, quick!" she breathed. "Oh, these cords!" She plucked at them with fingers that held a wonderful memory of having been kissed as they had withdrawn themselves.

"Knife—under my waistcoat," Lance said in a whisper that matched hers. "Lucky that devil didn't search me. Put it there for a joke, but it comes in handy."

This was another brand-new section of experience, as Elizabeth reconstructed it afterward—this brief, thrilling, unaccountably radiant period of searching for and retrieving from Lance's person the short, keen weapon which he had borrowed from the trophy on the hall paneling. Who could have guessed that a waistcoat, at close range, could be so romantic an object, especially when the first independent movement of Lance's freed arms was to catch her against it and hold her there tight for an instant.

"Oh—oh—h! Bliss—bliss!" went the eddying current of Elizabeth's thoughts. "Oh, you conceited fool, you! He's only doing it to show his gratitude. Hilda Beresford! How could a man, who goes driving at night in God-forsaken places with Hilda Beresford, ever remotely consider you?"

She disengaged herself with a blend of primness, dewy rosiness, and the pretense that nothing intimate had occurred at all, which would have amused her in any one else. Only when she

had led him through the small room, and through the French window, did she speak again.

"You're not hurt?" As he tensed his arms she began in a businesslike way to rub them, at first tentatively, then briskly, a treatment which he seemed in no hurry to stop.

"Oh, you miraculous Elizabeth," he wondered. "How did you do it?"

"No time to tell you now," responded Elizabeth, strictly business. "The sooner we leave the better."

Lance's eyes plumbed the flickering darkness.

"The problem is how to get out of a park full of dead wood without crackling. Instead of squirming through underbrush and ditches in the time-honored manner, like lizards, I think the safest plan is to stick to the drive, like company."

"Wait! He—Garron, the old man, you know—said this path led to the drive near the gates. They're at the front still, I think."

"Queer. That motor—I didn't hear it, did you?" Lance mused. He followed her as she slipped down the narrow, crooked way, undulating around bushes that might rustle, picking her steps over roots that seemed to have the rudimentary sense of humor. Sprays flicked splashes of dew into their faces; their passage disengaged whiffs of perfume from neglected, overfreighted shrubs. At a sharp turn in the path Elizabeth paused to take several breaths of relief. Through the ragged holes in the branches the shimmer of the glasses of the disused greenhouses beckoned to them, and the pale line on the ground must indicate the drive.

"Safe!" she sighed. Turning her head to flash a smile of triumph to her companion, she swept around the bend of the road and straight into the hands of the man who stood there, obviously waiting.

"Quite safe," said Brangwyn politely.

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She twisted herself to shout despairingly over her shoulder the single word: "Run!"

"And leave you here? I hardly think so, young lady," responded her captor. "I have my opinion of him, but it doesn't run to that. Besides——" He laughed in his unpleasant, noiseless fashion, as Lance came out of the bushes with the gargoyle's clutch again on his sleeve. Elizabeth stared around wildly. It was incredible, stupidly cruel, that fate should have played her a trick like this, dangling rescue, like a bunch of grapes before a dry-throated desert wanderer, only to wing it away again. It was unfeeling, brutally callous. Then her glance fell on some one more unhappy than she was, to judge by his hang-dog face.

She gave Garron the full benefit of her scorn, but she said nothing. She, with her own passionate loyalties, understood too well what had happened. With the instinct of the born retainer, Garron had returned to his first allegiance; as an old dog may give a stranger a casual obedience, under the bribe of food or fancy, yet can be counted on to run after his ancient master in the end. Stricken with the fear that he was spoiling some plan of Mr. Owen's, some plan whose failure might entail direful consequences, Garron had confessed. He was a perfect example of the temperament whose "faith unfaithful makes him falsely true."

It was like dreaming a bad dream over again to find herself back in the library, Elizabeth thought, with Lance once more tied in the chair, quite as scientifically as before, and Brangwyn facing him like a judge. The simile forced itself, because his manner was now far less violent and more judicial. His first words accounted for the change.

"I need not tell you," he began, "how materially my position is strengthened by this young lady's presence. I gave

her a decent chance to leave, but as she didn't take it, and as she has been doing all in her power to frustrate my plans, I may say that I intend to profit by her being here." Parenthetically he added: "It gives me more time, too. She might have gone for the police, after all. Well, you'll speak now, Mac. A short time ago you had nobody to consider but yourself. Now you have her. I don't know what she may be to you, but the fact that she took considerable chances to help you——"

"Stop!" said Lance. There was genuine astonishment in his tone. "You don't mean that you'd—you'd hurt *her* in any way? Heavens! I didn't suppose any creature in this world could be such a cur as that. You *couldn't*. You're kidding me. Let her go. I'll stand anything you like, but——"

Elizabeth got directly in front of Brangwyn, her back squarely to Lance. The room swam a little, but she herself was in a cold, strange mood that made her quite a different entity from the girl she had lived with heretofore. This did not concern that girl at all. She spoke so low that none of the others heard her.

"Let him go," she began. Then her throat closed. The rest refused to come.

They exchanged a long look; on his side a singular look, a look that combined admiration, and a certain pity, and surely a glint of amusement. Brangwyn shook his head, as one meets the absurd suggestions of a child. Lance's voice rang out. The chair strained and protested under his violent struggles, but the gargoyle put out an interested hand and quieted it.

"What are you saying to him, Elizabeth?" Lance shouted. "See here, I'll do this. I can't tell you ruffians where the sapphire is, but I'll try to induce the person who knows to tell you. I think I can succeed, too. Is that good enough?"

"As I told you, there's a matter more

important than the sapphire in which I'm interested," Brangwyn responded menacingly.

The same impervious, mulish expression, more eloquent than words, hardened Lance's mouth again.

"Very well," said Brangwyn. "In that case——"

He stopped short. His whole form swung toward the hall. Some one had again opened the folding doors and the wide space was disclosed with all its rich deception of jeweled, heraldic window and armor-hung wainscoting. The gargoyle raised his nose like a hound on the scent. Garron went quickly out. The noise of a motor was on the air, unmistakably this time. The front door opened, and there was the murmur of a woman's rich, vibrating tones. Then, against the colored interior that was so like the back drop, stood a woman who was destined during the next few moments to go through one of the most dramatic scenes of her career.

"Hilda Beresford!" Elizabeth recognized her with certainty. How could any man who had known her well ever dream of another woman?

She was tall and golden-haired, and the form under the superb coat was as nearly perfect as the human form can be, but that was only the beginning. Her movements had the grace that comes from just proportions and the sense of beauty—beauty adapted to daily living; yet that was hardly more than the beginning. She was the guardian of an inner fire, a warmth that flashed from her blue eyes, that radiated like flames from her finger tips, that drew the heart out of one's breast, because in it was not the cruelty but the blessedness of fire. Elizabeth acknowledged it with humility. As for Brangwyn, as he rose to his feet a smolder like the yearning, responsive reflection of it came into his deep-set gaze.

With one regal glance Hilda Beresford took in the scene, and appeared

to take in its implications. She spoke like a queen issuing her commands to lesser folk.

"Untie him!"

Without even waiting for his chief's nod, the gargoyle obeyed. As Lance got up the woman crossed to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"What are they doing to you?" she asked. Brangwyn she paid no attention to, yet, to Elizabeth's high-strung perception, it was as if she were most keenly aware of him all the time, as if he were to her the chief actor.

When Lance returned no answer she asked in a half whisper:

"Who is the girl?"

"My girl."

Straight into his eyes she smiled—a beautiful smile. It made Elizabeth want to cry with sheer happiness. Then the glance passed to the gargoyle, and he came out of his trance and joined Garron who had been lingering in the hall. Both vanished somewhere into the outside of the situation.

After that, last of all, Hilda Beresford allowed herself to become aware of Brangwyn's existence. She waited until he said miserably:

"After all, Hilda, we both have things to forgive each other." He spoke quite as though they were alone, and by this Elizabeth gauged the depth of his feeling. He was beyond caring.

"Have I any *more* to forgive you, Owen?" she asked in her sweet, significant voice, that reminded one of running water, and cream, and honey, all together, and made Elizabeth remember rich hillsides. "And what have you had to forgive me?"

"Your silence."

She weighed this, then nodded.

"A good point. You're right. Nothing is harder to forgive than that. Well, suppose we break the silence, you and I? It had to come to that some time; it may as well be now. First, what does this melodramatic trussing up mean? It cer-

tainly ought to mean something to your victim."

"Very well," Brangwyn said. "I am more than willing to tell you, if you are prepared to explain certain things to me which, I must admit, have troubled me beyond words. In the first place, I had my victim, as you call him, in a position where I hoped to get the truth out of him."

"What truth? Oh, no, no!" She stopped herself with an outflung hand as graceful as one of the tendrils which had brushed Elizabeth's cheek that evening. "Don't let's fire questions and answers at each other. There's no better way to misunderstandings, cross-purposes. Tell your story in your own way, and then I'll tell mine."

Brangwyn glanced meaningly at the two young spectators who had drawn together. Again Hilda smiled beautifully.

"Let them hear it. It would be a shame to turn them out. Aren't they sweet—so wistful and harmless? Just like two Chelsea figures on the mantelpiece."

Brangwyn's brows drew together, but he was making no objections which might obstruct traffic. He plunged into the subject.

"I must recall things about which we quarreled. You don't mind?"

"I mind nothing which is necessary."

"I'm afraid this is. Two years ago, Hilda, you did me the honor of promising to become my wife some day, though you put me off announcing the engagement. You knew that my marriage had been a wretched failure, and that I had at length obtained my liberty. You knew, also, that the woman who had been my wife nursed various grudges against me, which she frankly threatened to pay me out for. One of these was my refusal to give her the Bevan sapphire."

"Why had you never given it to her?" asked Hilda softly.

"Because by the time I obtained it I

had discovered what she was. It was a jewel belonging to her family, but I got it by purchase from her brother, who was hard up. She pretended that she had a right to it, as a family jewel; I differed with her. She said that she would get it by any means, fair or foul—warned me."

"Was that your only reason?"

Brangwyn hesitated as though words were hard to find.

"The truth is I had a sentiment, you might almost say a superstition, about the stone. I had a fancy about gems, knew a good deal about them, so that they have personalities to me. You understand, I know. This sapphire was the loveliest stone I had ever seen; it seemed an indignity, a profanation, to give it to any one who was not worthy of it—who was not worthy of the best I had to give. I kept it for that."

They had again forgotten the listeners.

"You gave it to me."

"It was a symbol. With it I gave all my love, my adoration, my trust. I hadn't had any too good luck with women, but I thought I'd found a new variety. I didn't ask you any questions about yourself, did I? I made that a point of honor. But when I learned that you had gone to a remote little Southern settlement, that you had met a man there, that you had been driving with him late at night, when you were held up by some highwaymen—amateurs, they turned out to be—what was I to think? I was ready, glad to believe any explanation you might condescend to offer. And you—declined to give any. Again, what was I to think? Well, I didn't think it. I may be a fool, but not so great a fool as to doubt you. After two years of humble pie I was graciously taken back. You told me that you had lost the sapphire, and I asked no more about it. I came here to-day to look the old place over, because you said you'd like a country place within an

easy drive of New York. I know you promised to run down and give it a look, but I hardly expected you so soon. How did you get away from Canada without the press at your heels?"

"By airplane, quite suddenly, without telling anybody," answered the wonderful lady. "A nice boy I know. Mrs. Bromley, my watch dog, came, too, praying audibly to be preserved all the way. When the world hears it will be put down to temperament. Awfully convenient to have a reputation for eccentricity." Without a break she went on: "How did you find out about the highwaymen? We gave them all our money and I never heard any more about them. They melted away."

"I found out from one of them."

This time she did show surprise.

"That—that remarkable man who was here just now? I thought I had seen him before."

"Yes! He really isn't a criminal by profession, you know. That was his first and last trial. He recognized you from your pictures in the newspapers, and, as our names had been bracketed together, he came to me. His object, frankly, was not above reproach, but we——" Brangwyn dropped his words thoughtfully. "We had a talk, and it ended in his entering my employ."

"As what?"

"Ostensibly as chauffeur; he could drive a car. Actually as secret service. Don't misjudge me, Hilda; hear me first. What I wanted was to find the man with whom you had been driving. Not that I distrusted you. But I believed that this man knew that you had the Bevan sapphire, and that he arranged the hold-up and was in league with the highwaymen. Now, Yorke, my new employee, denied this—I didn't believe him—and he protested that all he could find out about your companion was that he had given his name at the inn as Macdonald, and that he and the lady, immediately on returning to the inn,

as Yorke's gang allowed them to do, had paid their bills and departed, vanished to parts unknown. I suspected then that Macdonald had managed to get the sapphire for himself, and—this was the real point—I was convinced that he was acting for my former wife; that she was at the bottom of the scheme. Through her brother, who ran with some pretty shady characters, she might have arranged it."

"He believed all that of *you*?" Elizabeth began in a furious undertone. Over the absorbed interest of Lance a smile passed.

"That's nothing to what he accused me of to my face," he murmured.

"The object of my life became the finding of Macdonald. Not only to satisfy myself of the truth, and to get back the sapphire for you, but most of all in order to protect you from the man. That you should have met him as you did showed that you knew him well, that he had some influence with you. How he might use it was a constant terror to me. For two years Yorke and I have hunted for him. My only means of identifying him was through Yorke's memory of him. Twice he pointed him out to me in a crowd, but both times we lost him. Then, to-night, he simply walked into the house, brought here by Heaven knows what."

"By the spirit in the feet," murmured Lance.

Hilda leaned over to the tall man and shook him as though nothing short of bodily violence would relieve her feelings.

"Good heavens! I never dreamed of any of this," she wailed. "Why—why didn't you speak out at the time, instead of treating me in that fiendishly noble manner and fancying horrors?"

"You wouldn't let me. You quarreled with me and cut me off for two years—two lonely, bitter years, Hilda."

With her inimitable charm she turned the shaking into a caress, as though

brushing away the traces of that deplorable period.

"I'm sorry. You're right. I couldn't see anything except your suspicions of me."

"But I had none."

"Well, your contradictions, your— Oh, something got between us. What an imagination you have! You ought to write plays—we need that kind. And you believed that—that innocent over there was in league with bandits? Now where on earth shall I begin? The proper way is to work up to the climax. I'll begin with the sapphire. Where do you think it is?"

"Have you recovered it?"

"Not exactly. Wait—don't hurry my effects. In the first place, my good man, you understand this, don't you? I couldn't afford to have that stone stolen from me, because it would serve to identify me. It was well known that I owned it, and it's as much a landmark as the Marble Arch in London. When Lance and I were surrounded by those dangerous-looking faces I saw in a flash that they mustn't get it. Nobody must know that I was at that place in the wilderness with a handsome young man," explained Hilda with angelic serenity. "And having one minute to hide the thing—it's fortunate it was set in a pendant instead of a tiara, isn't it?—I hid it in the only available place."

With her instinct for the dramatic effect, she paused.

"I wish you could have beheld our conveyance," she went on reminiscently. "That name describes it. The roads around that inn are so shocking that no car could plow them. To be alone, beyond the reach of eavesdroppers, we had hired a horse-dragged vehicle. I think the owner called it a buggy. The cushions were leather, immodestly revealing their stuffings here and there, and, for all I know," said Hilda impressively, "the Bevan sapphire is still at this present moment reposing inside

the seat of that conveyance, where I thrust it through a rent, in the stable of that Florida inn."

There was an outcry from Elizabeth, and Brangwyn demanded:

"You never claimed it?"

"How could I without giving the whole show away? I never dared go near the place again."

"And—that man?"

"Lance? I couldn't tell him where I had hidden it, for fear he would try to get it back for me, and the whole story would come out. Do you know of any way of buying a hopeless buggy, when you have plenty of motor cars already, without exciting suspicion?"

"I think it can be managed. You shall have your pendant again."

"Thank you. I've been miserable about it," she said with one of her swift changes, this time to pathos. "That's why I was so cross with you, old thing." Her smile finished the sentence for her. "Never fear," it said, "never fear that I shan't make it up to you."

"And now," suggested Brangwyn with rather tragic delicacy, "are you going to tell me what that man is to you?" As he spoke, that spellbound observer, Elizabeth Hope, made a discovery. He hadn't a face from the underworld at all. His face could be nice, even intelligently charming. It was one of her thrills of the evening.

"Of course!" responded Hilda. "*He's* the climax I'm working up to. Only"—a shadow, like a cloud that pauses above a flower-filled meadow, settled over her eyes—"it's a hard story to tell, and you must be very nice to me while I'm telling it, Owen, dear—all of you—because it's very, very sad." She trailed over to the sofa which stood against the farther wall and sat in the middle of it. "I think it will be easier," she said gently, "if you sit, one on each side, and hold my hands. And you—what's your pretty name? Elizabeth? How sweet! You can sit on this hassock at my feet

as befits your tender age." All this was uttered in a tone that made Elizabeth want to melt into sobs; the light words were so unutterably shot with sorrow, with hauntings of past dread, with all sorts of dead things. She felt herself shrinking from what she was still to hear.

Neither man had made the faintest protest against the extraordinary arrangement. Under the compulsion of that voice, as she had desired so was it done.

"I couldn't be found there with Lance because that would drag up the story of my early marriage, and that would have ruined me," she said with the same simplicity.

Brangwyn bowed his head. The bitterness of this for him struck Elizabeth like a blow. It was new to him. Just as plainly, to Lance, who sat quietly stroking the strange woman's hands, it was ancient history.

"I was married very young. I lived with my sister, Mildred Frazer, and her husband, a good, sensible man, of what we frankly call the middle class. They were pleased when Carolus Marrens courted me. He was a Hollander, evidently with very good connections in London. He belonged to West End clubs and went with people who would have considered us very inconsiderable. We were married the year the south African war started." She broke out with a sudden poignant cry of remembrance: "Oh, you don't know how attractive he was, always laughing and easy to get on with." Then her voice trailed off into a shuddering whisper. "Before the end of that year"—her head went down into her hands—"before the the end of that year—my husband was shot in the Tower, as a spy."

Both men leaned impulsively forward, but she turned to Lance and let him gather her into his arms. After an interval, during which the girl on the hassock found her face pressed

against the woman's knee in a passion of sympathy, Hilda Beresford drew herself upright and went on in her strained, courageous voice:

"I know that he did what he did because he felt it was his duty to his people. He was a Boer, of course. But I couldn't get any comfort out of that, or out of anything. I was crushed, overwhelmed, *stone*. When my baby was born I couldn't even love him, or be anything but glad when my sister, who was childless, offered to take him. We came to the States, partly because of the awful thing that had happened. But after a while I changed my name and went back. I had to make a living, and I had found that I could act. I think that saved me." She stretched out her clasped hands and shook them tensely. "Thank God for art!" said Hilda Beresford. Then she slipped her hands back into the palms waiting on either side to clasp them.

"Two years ago I came back to the States, and then I saw my boy again, and—well, I went crazy over him, as you say here. He had been brought up as Mildred's, but now she, dear woman that she is, made a great sacrifice for me. She told him the truth. When I went down to Palm Beach I managed to slip away to meet him at that buried little settlement, because it seemed safe, just to have him to myself for a bit and feel like a mother. You see, don't you, that I couldn't acknowledge him to the world, without that horrible old story coming up again? At home that would have ruined me. All the spy troubles of the Great War have made people there so—so bitter, so unforgiving about such things. Disloyalty to the empire—they never forget or forgive it. I should have had to leave the stage; at least, I'm afraid so. I made Lance promise never to tell—not under any circumstances."

She touched Brangwyn's averted cheek.

"Dear, I meant to tell you before we were married, but it was so hard. That was another reason I let you go," she told him.

He caught her hand, curving it about his mouth. Then he faced her again.

"You women! How you confuse values! As though anything could have mattered as much as your withdrawal of yourself." His smile grew slightly grim. "It may please you to learn that your son kept his promise—under any circumstances—almost."

Hilda put the tips of her fingers on his shoulders.

"Owen," she said tensely, "you didn't really, really mean to hurt him, did you? I can't believe it. It's too unlike you."

The brick-dust red which was Brangwyn's manner of blushing flamed once more.

"Honestly, I did not. I intended to scare him, to threaten, to do everything short of using physical torture, but—no, I never meant to go that far." This was the time when Elizabeth decided that, though he might not appeal to all tastes, the master of the house was a fascinating person.

"In that case," decided Hilda, "I see no reason why there's anything to prevent your shaking hands." She held the two masculine palms together for a long moment.

"Sorry," Brangwyn muttered, as though that were saying everything. "If I had only known you were trying to protect her, too!"

"Well, that's all right now," Hilda smiled. Then she uttered a startling wail. "Oh, I am a brute! Oh, what a selfish pig I am! I brought poor old Bromley with me—by the car we got in town—I couldn't wait till morning to see the place—knew there'd be no time, anyway, as soon as the dear press found me out—but I preserved the proprieties by dragging her along. And, God forgive me, I've absolutely forgotten her,

after asking her to wait outside just half a mo'! Run, Lance, there's a golden-haired angel, and fetch her in. And be sure to kiss her! Then she'll forgive anything!"

It was after Lance's errand had been accomplished, and a discomposed and resentful elderly lady had been smoothed down, and was accompanying the great actress and her future husband in an exhaustive tour of the upper rooms, that Lance found himself alone, under the baronial window, with Elizabeth. He was not at all sure how the girl was going to take what he was determined to divulge. She might not be ready; she might be fiercely defensive. She had been so positive that they were not in love with each other. But for him the predestined time of telling had come.

Calmly he put his arms about her; that is, his manner was calm but his pulses were violent.

"Oh!" gasped Elizabeth, but not very convincingly. "How dare you?"

"You can't quarrel with me, darling," Lance informed her firmly. "Talk about doing a story together—we're going to live the most smashing gorgeous story you ever dreamed of. This is what we started out to find and I'm not going to allow you to miss it. It would be too cruelly unfeeling to you. We love each other, Elizabeth!" he told her enthusiastically.

"When did you—find that out?" asked a small and cowed voice from the magic surface of the waistcoat.

"I've suspicioned it for ages, but I knew it for keeps when you came charging through that door. When did you?"

"I—don't," wailed Elizabeth's last futile attempt at rebellion.

"Oh, fibs! Wicked, unwomanly fibs!" responded Lance vigorously. "Then why are you clinging to me so—distractingly? My nerves have gone through a lot to-night, but there's just one more shock they won't survive.

And that's putting off that kiss one more second. Oh, come along with me, child, and live! Come and be happy! That's what you were sent into this world for. That and me!"

After an interval Elizabeth looked up with a faint memory puckering her brows.

"We did come for a story," she said vaguely.

"We did. We got it—a volunteer, as my moth—my Aunt Mildred calls the

flowers that come up in the garden by themselves."

"But we can't use it—your mother's story, and all."

"Oh, that one! I don't mean that, I mean this one—our story; that interests me particularly just now," responded Lance, expressing his interest in the time-honored manner. "After all," he added with intense conviction, "what's any plot without a young-love interest?"

THE END.



TO ANOTHER HELEN

HELEN, the peril of your hands and face
Is an adventure to embark upon!
So was it Paris, restive in his place,
Because of beauty, sailed against the sun!
So urged, the gods had given godlike grace,
And doom became a gold caparison
Worthy of the princeliest of his race
That braved the thousand ships from Ilion!

Oh, my desire, my beauty, my unrest!
What seldom star, what lost apocalypse,
Revives with your coming? A thousand ships
Are launched once more—but here, against my breast—
Doomed, as of old, to failure and eclipse
In the vast night of an unfathomed west!

GUSTAV DAVIDSON.



Pantomime

By Jessie Henderson

Author of "The Mouth of the Dragon,"
"Around the Corner"

IN vain Bryant Carter, standing well back among the shadows at the rear of the big room, tried to tell himself that there was no more of drama in the graceful pantomime than appeared on the surface. Carter was sensitive to impressions. Somehow he could not rid himself of the idea that the three vivid, masked dancers, twirling and stamping across the polished floor like the spirit of Spain incarnate, were filled with a greater intensity than even the dance or the occasion warranted.

Until Juanita appeared, the bachelor dinner had been banal enough. As the prospective bridegroom, Neal Trudeau had become conventionally flushed with wine till his normal self-assurance turned to the insolence on which it always bordered. The rest of the men had spoken the same congratulations and cracked the same jokes, spilled coffee and wine on the damask cloth, and ground cakes under careless heels, till Carter's fastidious soul drew itself aloof in faint disgust and utter boredom.

Why must men act like barbarians, simply because one of them was going to marry the most sought-after girl in New York? Why must the best man acquire appendicitis at the last moment? Why must the bridegroom, met by chance at the club, elect Bryant Carter to the vacant post? And why, by all that was sensible, had he, Bryant Carter, accepted?

Thus Carter to his weary soul, viewing the brilliantly lighted dining room with growing disfavor, shrugging at the

roars of empty merriment, and a little ashamed of his own supercilious scorn. After six years of prowling about the quietest corners of Europe, to be let in for this on his first evening home! Accepting an invitation like a mesmerized fool, just because Neal Trudeau gave it in that dare-you-to-refuse manner which Carter had been too polite or too indifferent to combat. Well, Trudeau usually got what he wanted. Carter remembered that fact well enough. Women liked the masterful manner, which was one reason why Carter disliked Trudeau.

"Smug brute!" Carter commented inwardly, with a poisonous glance toward the smooth black head and sparkling black eyes of the bridegroom. Carter's own manner was far from masterful. Had it been less considerate, less knightly, the thought of orange blossoms might not now make him sick at heart. Ruth and he might even, at this minute, be—— He shook his great frame and ran a hand over the chestnut hair that never would lie sleek and shiny, like Trudeau's. Romance and Ruth—for a year he had been trying to forget them both. He never would. He knew that by the sudden surge of longing that shook him now. Where was she, with those clear gray eyes, that tender little mouth?

The man beside him made unintelligible sounds. At last Carter understood the fellow was trying to pronounce the bride's name: Rachel Sedgwick. Droll, how a few glasses of wine could tangle

those syllables. The man babbled on, with alcoholic owl eyes focused on nothing, speaking confidentially in an elaborate whisper.

"She izzen' crazy 'bout Trudeau, y'unnerstan'. Her—her ol' mansh hard hit in Wall Shtreet. Year ago. Ol' Trudeau shays 'Aw' righ'; gimme Rashal.' Terrible crush on the girl. Terrible. Girl didn't like idea. Only way shave ol' man. Trudeau got Wall Shtreet insh vest pocket. Girl shays: 'Aw' right', but keepsh posh—posh-t-ponin' for whole year. At lash' ol' Trudeau up and shays——"

"Shut up!" remarked Carter.

"But I'm tellin' you," protested the aggrieved neighbor. "Ev'one wondersh why she fallsh for ol' Trudeau. Not her shtyle 'tall. Girl can't help shelf. Thash why. Only few frensh knowsh 'bout it——"

"Well, it seems that will soon be remedied," Carter observed and walked away.

It was then that the lights had flicked out, yielding to a calcium cleverly played on the far end of the room, and Juanita had entered.

Even in the half day he had spent in his home town, Carter had heard of Juanita. Hailed throughout Europe as the greatest dancer of her time, she was only just arrived to conquer America. It was considered a stroke of genius on the part of their host's entertainment committee to induce Juanita to dance at this dinner on the eve of her first professional appearance in New York.

From the instant the exquisite figure in the brilliant shawl and the sharply black mask whirled into the calcium moonlight, it was evident that press agents for once had spoken less than the truth. Juanita did not seem to move to the Spanish music that throbbed unseen behind the tall palms. The music seemed to bear her along on its languorous cadences, as a breeze might bear a poppy petal.

Commonplace enough in its idea, the little pantomime rose to epic heights by magic of Juanita's extraordinary art. It was the story of two women in love with a toreador. Ramon, Juanita's customary dancing partner, a tall youth in bright-green satin with an astonishing crimson cloak over his arm, wooed the dancer as the flutes and violins sang softly. Coquettish, alluring, she eluded his pursuit on winged golden feet, her yellow skirts flashing away from him as she twirled faster and faster, only to drop at last into his arms.

Ramon bent to kiss her upraised face when out into the calcium glided a slender little creature in magenta and silver, masked like the other two. On twinkling toes—less expert than Juanita's but thoroughly adequate—she flitted past Ramon, throwing over her shoulder a glance that made his grasp on Juanita loosen, made him turn and follow.

The music beat high into a wail of despair, of passionate revenge as Juanita caught at her lover's hand, was repulsed, and sought with clenched fingers the jeweled dagger in her girdle.

Memory stirred in Carter, and he frowned. Surely a tenseness, over and above that of the little drama, radiated from the dancers. In the shadows at the end of the room he bent forward. It was six years since he had made that uncomfortable journey into Roumania with Trudeau; uncomfortable because for the first time he saw this former college friend in his true colors. In anticipation, a trip of a month with Trudeau into a quaint country was delightful. Trudeau, a little bumptious perhaps in college days but nevertheless a hail-fellow-well-met sort, ought to have been a pleasant traveling companion. His impulsive suggestion, that night in the Paris café, that they explore Roumania together, seemed an ideal one. Carter's plans took him in that direction. It was good to have an acquaintance along.

It was all pleasant enough, too, until

Trudeau struck up a flirtation with some beautiful unknown on the train. And another with some Roumanian lady who proved to be of such high degree that her husband took a pot shot at Trudeau one evening at the inn. And a third—a really serious affair this time—with Dolores Cenac.

Carter remembered the silvery night he and Trudeau motored down a long, shaded hill to find a gypsy camp in the hollow at its foot. The gypsies were hospitable. Carter wondered, as often before, just how Trudeau repaid that hospitality. Dolores Cenac—Roumanian or Spanish or what you will, but gypsy to the core—had been marvelously beautiful. Like other gypsy girls, she had been marvelously well guarded, too. How many of the nights, when Carter missed Trudeau from his room at the wayside hotel a few miles farther on, had Trudeau spent at the encampment?

Trudeau never would talk about this affair much. When at last he and Carter moved on he seemed to have no regrets. As for Dolores—

Carter watched the lovely figure of Juanita, dancing its despair and rage. Dolores had been the premier dancer of her tribe. There was something about Juanita which reminded him of that lithe young gypsy wench.

Perhaps the gypsy charm of Juanita brought memories to Trudeau, also. Carter noted that he stirred now and then in the shadows as the dramatic dance drew to a close. He dismissed the whole idea as preposterous, however, and concentrated on the sheer beauty of Juanita's movements as with infinite skill she stole the toreador's cloak, impersonated her faithless lover, and went in his place to meet the girl in silver and magenta. Gracefully she bent to kiss the girl, and as the magenta rival lifted her eager lips, Juanita folded the girl in two strong arms and thrust the jeweled dagger into her back. The music ended in a savage paean of triumph.

The calcium blinked off. After a black second or two the lights sprang up in the room. Ramon and the magenta girl were gone, and Juanita stood alone, bowing to the applause. Slowly, as the plaudits rose more loudly, Juanita removed her mask. Even as he caught his breath, Carter saw Trudeau start violently. For it was Dolores Cenac who stood before them.

With a flash of yellow skirts she was gone, but not before those magnificent dark eyes of hers had plunged for the fraction of a second into Trudeau's angry and uneasy face. Here was drama, indeed, and contretemps. Carter withdrew to the little stone balcony outside the long French windows to think it over.

And suddenly he found himself engrossed, not with Trudeau's problem, but with his own. The cool, soft air of the summer night, the solemn big stars above the roofs, the uncanny hush that gripped even the streets of New York at this early hour, brought back to him with the force of a blow a night in the Engadine when Ruth was by his side.

They had stolen away from the glaring lights of the hotel ballroom and wandered to a stone bench that commanded a view of distant mountains above which before long the first faint streak of dawn would burn. Strange interlude in the busy life of the builder of railroads across continents, that strange, sweet fortnight in the quiet mountains. Until Carter had met Ruth he had laughed gayly at the thought of love, especially this stuff called love at first sight. Two weeks of madness, and then—a brief note of farewell, and silence. She might have dropped down one of the bottomless fissures in the glacier, so completely had the American girl disappeared. Always he had sensed a mystery about her, a something that stopped short of utter frankness. But never had he sensed treachery. Even now, in spite of the hastily scrawled

lines with their almost incoherent message: "I love you, but we can never marry," he could not in his heart accuse this girl of anything more treacherous than failure to share her secret, whatever it might have been, with the man she loved.

For she loved him. Carter knew that. Knew it from the way her gray eyes softened when, in the dim light just before dawn, he took her into his arms. Knew it, too, from the way she wrenched her lips away from his and ran, stumbling and sobbing, up the path to the hotel.

Why hadn't he followed? Why had he allowed the knowledge that she wanted to be alone to check his impulse to pursue? If only he had caught her, held her in his arms, compelled her to pour out the whole story to him then and there— That would have been Trudeau's way. Instead, he had let her go; trusted to a calmer talk in the morning. And in the morning had come the little note that ended all his dreams.

Wounded men beg for a cigarette. Carter lighted one now, and his teeth clenched on it in an effort to deaden the pain. The whole despairing futility of his twelve months' search overwhelmed him. Ruth and her elderly companion had vanished early that morning, leaving no address. Carter came at last to believe that even the name, Ruth Morton, had been an alias. Who was she? What was she? And why did she run away from love? Even as he asked these questions, as he had asked them a thousand times before, the first pallor of daybreak shimmered in the east. Out of the stabbing memory of that other night, Carter cursed it.

The bachelor dinner was past history when he stepped back into the littered room. The room itself lay empty, but from the stairs he heard the murmur of bibulously gay departing guests. In order to avoid them, he inquired his way to a side exit, and stepped out in time

to see Juanita's motor car at the curb, with Juanita ensconced in its luxurious mauve cushions. The lights inside the car were not on, but Carter was close enough to see the dancer's face, pale as white fire, when she turned toward the doorway. Carter stood with his back to the illuminated arch for just an instant. Plainly, she did not recognize him, for she turned away with an impatient shrug. In the moment that it took him to step from the threshold into the darkness of the street, Carter had an impression of a magenta figure—still masked, oddly enough—standing on the other side of the car.

To this figure Juanita spoke. He caught an injunction to hurry. It was this, and the dancer's evident preoccupation, which decided Carter not to make himself known. He swung up the street in the opposite direction. Impelled by some impulse, he looked back when he reached the end of the block. He could almost have sworn that the man striding toward the car at the curb was angry, the steps were so resolute and long. Oh, well—probably Ramon, about to argue the lateness of the hour as an excuse for overtime. Even dancers, he smiled to himself, were not too artistic to be practical these days. And Ramon's mouth, beneath his mask in the Toreador dance, had looked sullen.

Dismissing the incident from a mind too harassed with the memory of Ruth to give room to much else, Carter strolled down the bare streets in the general direction of home. After the glare and heat of the dinner, the faint breeze, perfumed with freshness from the Jersey shore, was like a cool hand on his face. Riverside Drive lay hushed as an avenue in Pompeii. Untouched yet by that ghost of dawn which hardly dimmed the stars, the river was a streak of polished jet that mirrored a few golden lights. Far away a car whirred softly, not louder than the chirring of a night insect.

On the steep brick wall beside him the ivy moved with a noise like rustling silk. Behind the great pillars of stone that relieved the blank surface of the brick rose dim towers, and Carter recognized them suddenly. This was the colossal home of Sedgwick, that erstwhile colossus of Wall Street; he whose daughter was being sold to Trudeau in order to salvage the family fortunes.

Carter grimaced. Was it the duty of a decent citizen, he wondered, to tell the bride a little something about Juanita? The thought lingered an instant, and died. Obviously, it was the duty of a decent citizen to mind his own business. The bride without doubt was going into this marriage of convenience with open and calculating eyes.

Granting his cynicism, Carter paused beside one of the stone pillars to light another cigarette. His blue gaze swept the Sedgwick towers as he threw away the match, and then it came to rest upon something that darted around the corner of the brick wall and ran toward him.

By the lightness and grace of her step, she was a young girl, and by the indecision of her course she was a young girl in a panic. First she sprang into the ineffectual shadow of one of the small trees along the edge of the sidewalk. Abandoning this shelter almost at once, she fled over to the ivied wall, crouched forward like a deer before the hunter, and came toward Carter at top speed. He could hear the light pelting of her feet upon the pavement.

His own step slowed mechanically. Now that the girl was nearer, he saw that she wore a dark scarf over her head. The only sign she gave of noticing his presence was to draw this veil more closely across her face as she approached. Carter halted, uncertain whether to speak, and she passed him in a rush of fluttering skirts, one white hand clutching the scarf at her throat. He could hear her panting breath as she flew by, and recognized in it the hoarse note that

comes when a runner is on the point of exhaustion yet straining every nerve to run a few yards more.

Carter's glance, racing up and down the street, descried no pursuer. He turned to watch that straining figure. She reached the corner of the wall which he himself had just rounded. On the point of turning it, she stopped so abruptly that the movement flung her against the ivy. He saw her peer cautiously around the corner, then wheel and run haltingly back in the direction from which she had come.

With the insanity of utter terror, she dashed herself against one of the stone pillars, clawed at the vines, and tried to pull herself to the top of the wall. The strength of her fear actually took the girl a foot or two up to the stone post. Carter reached the spot in time to catch her as she fell limply back.

"Hide me!" she gasped. The grip of those little fingers reminded him of the grip a drowning schoolmate had once fastened on his wrist.

At the same moment, one cause of her alarm came round the corner. With the quickness of instinct, rather than of thought, Carter folded the girl to him and pulled her head down upon his shoulder as the bluecoat approached. She buried her face. In the few moments it took for the policeman to stroll up to them Carter felt her heart pounding. She sagged, exhausted, in his arms, her whole body wrenched with the effort to breathe. The vanity bag she carried slid from her nerveless fingers. Carter caught it and thrust the bauble into his pocket.

It was still dark there in the lee of the stone pillar and beneath the little rustling trees. But it was not too dark for Carter to recognize suddenly the magenta-and-silver gown of the rival dancer in Juanita's pantomime. Carter, speechless with surprise, looked up to find the disapproving bulk of the policeman standing beside him.

"Hey, you!" the policeman said.

Carter tightened his arms around the figure that grew rigid at the hostile voice.

"She soused?" the officer inquired. "I got a good mind to run you in, both of youse. I bit, if I searched you, there'd be a flask or something."

The figure in his arms writhed feebly. So she was afraid of being searched!

He gave what was meant to be a laugh of reassurance.

"No such luck!" His tone had the proper lightness. "I haven't anything on my hip but this." He drew out a couple of bills and held them toward the policeman.

That worthy bristled.

"Say, if you think you can bribe me——" he began.

"Good heavens, no!" Carter's tone was sincerity itself. "I merely thought perhaps you'd be willing to send a taxi down here, when you reach the next block. The young lady and I——" He glanced down at the immobile magenta figure. "We had a little quarrel and were just making up. If you——"

The policeman looked long at Carter, and long at the bills.

"Oh, well," he conceded, grinning. "But don't be too long making up. You'll look kinda funny in them clothes after sunrise. Naw, keep your money."

Carter flicked the bills invitingly.

"Oh, well——" the officer said, and put them in his pocket. They listened to his solid footsteps growing fainter down the street.

A murmur of thanks from the magenta lady in his arms roused him. She was fumbling in his pocket, and her icy fingers touched his own as he retrieved a small beaded vanity bag, with half its rouge-and-powder contents falling out. She crammed the paraphernalia hastily into the receptacle, her head still bent.

In the imperceptibly growing light he could see thick golden hair beneath the thin, dark scarf. At last she raised her

face against the quickening east, and held out her hand. The scarf fell down about her shoulders. Carter looked into a pair of clear gray eyes, saw a tender little mouth, before the gratitude in her face gave way to incredulous horror.

"Ruth!" he cried.

Stepping back a pace, she put out warding hands.

"Not you!" she whispered. "Oh, my dear, it isn't you?"

Before he could guess her intention, she wheeled and was fleeing away from him down the half gloom of the street. When he gained the corner she was nowhere in sight.

With a heart divided between foreboding and joy, Carter reached his rooms. Whatever the mystery, surely he now held the key to it. It would be easy enough to find out from Juanita the identity of her dancing assistant. This was the first step, and a step he would take at once. He would telephone Juanita's hotel at the earliest possible moment. Might one disturb before nine an artiste who had danced till three? One would! Let the gypsy temperament do its worst.

Yet when he called the hotel a little before nine o'clock the voice at the other end of the telephone informed him that Señorita Cenac was not at home. Carter explained. He pleaded. He fumed. The gruff voice insisted that the Spanish dancer was not in her suite; no, nor her maid, either. She was out, even so early in the day, and nobody knew when she would return.

But if the gentleman would leave his name——

Carter did so, and his address, and—as the unyielding voice kept asking it—he told something of the nature of his business with the señorita. He wanted the address of the señorita's assistant who had danced last evening at Mr. Trudeau's dinner.

"H'm," said the voice with significance. Carter hung up, vexed and dis-

appointed, remembering impatiently Trudeau's wedding at high noon.

He found the ushers seething with excitement.

"Quite a facer, what?" asked his owl-eyed neighbor of last night. Restored to rosy sobriety, the youth was perky as a robin.

"Getting married, you mean?" Carter inquired, grimly humorous. His own face showed the haggard lines of sleepless anxiety.

"Getting murdered, I mean," rejoined the robin. "What the deuce! Are you any good at fastening a bow tie?"

"Murdered?" Carter repeated.

The robin cocked his head.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard! Say, do you read the newspapers, or don't you?"

Carter jerked the robin's tie into place.

"I haven't had time to look at them this morning."

"Then you don't know?" The robin's chirp became tinged with awe at the import of his news. "Juanita's dead."

Carter felt faint.

"Dead?"

"Must be, by now," the robin stated. "Found stabbed in her car when it reached her hotel last night—or this morning. That jeweled dagger thing she used in the dance, 'member? Unconscious. They rushed her to the hospital, of course, but she hadn't recovered consciousness half an hour ago. Death expected any moment. Police running round in circles. Manager in hysterics. Ramon——"

Brushing the robin aside, Carter went in search of a newspaper. He found a corner withdrawn from the swirl of wedding preparations, and devoured the item beneath the two-inch headlines.

The news was meager enough. Juanita, the greatest dancer of all time, had been driven home by Ramon, her partner, the chauffeur having been dismissed early in the evening.

More than half asleep in the chauffeur's seat, he dimly remembered a man's voice behind him, and a woman's. He had indeed been asleep when awakened by a command in Roumanian to drive home. He thought at the time that the command was in Juanita's deep, soft voice. Now he was not so sure. He drove to the hotel, not looking behind him, for Juanita had drawn the curtains across the window in back of the chauffeur's seat. When they reached the hotel, he found he had been driving a woman unconscious—half dead; a deep wound in her side; a jeweled dagger at her feet. He was completely heartbroken.

The news item ended coldly with the information that Ramon, who was known to have quarreled bitterly with Juanita over something that night, had been arrested. And that the police were searching for Juanita's woman partner, "a slim girl in a dress of magenta tafeta," who disappeared at about the time of the stabbing. Ramon protested that he did not know this woman's name.

The hand which, falling on Carter's shoulder, roused him at last was that of Trudeau.

"You're a fine best man!" Trudeau rallied him. "Don't you know you're supposed to be looking after the faltering bridegroom?" His dark eyes sobered as they took note of the newspaper in Carter's hands. "Awful, isn't it?" he commented. "So full of warmth and grace and life a few hours ago, and now——" He made an expressive gesture of finality.

Carter met his gaze with a direct blue glance. Was it possible Trudeau did not realize that Carter had recognized Dolores Cenac?

"It's awful enough," he replied. Would this man who had once loved Dolores go calmly on with his marriage to another woman while Dolores lay at death's door? And yet, on the other hand, what else was there to do? "I

wonder what's back of it," Carter could not forbear adding.

Trudeau raised his eyebrows.

"A lover's quarrel, no doubt. Well, you have the ring? It's about time to go."

Carter nodded, feeling in the outside pocket where, the night before, he had placed the little diamond-and-platinum circlet entrusted to him by the bridegroom. "Not an inside pocket," Trudeau had warned. "I'll go crazy if you begin fumbling in your waistcoat, the way a best man always does."

The carved round of the circlet reassured his exploring fingers now. How characteristic of Trudeau, to avoid any possible slip-up of his plans. And, did he know it, there was chance enough for slip-up with a best man whose thoughts were one mad cyclone of doubt, apprehension, and speculation. Ruth Morton! Who was she? What had she done, to be in such an agony of fear? Oh, to get this wedding over and slip away to search for Ruth!

Unquestionably the bridegroom was the more self-possessed of the two who stood at the lily-banked altar, awaiting the slow approach of the bride. She came down the aisle at an interminably laggard gait, on the arm of the father whose fortune she thereby salvaged. Head modestly bent, she was a gracious tower of ivory satin under clouds of shrouding lace.

The ceremony droned on. Heavy strains from the organ, heavy scent of flowers. Carter felt dizzy, dazed, heedless of what went on around him. That telephone message of his to Juanita's hotel— Why, of course! A detective had been at the other end of the wire. That accounted for the gruff voice and the many searching questions. No doubt the police were checking up on every call that came to the dancer's apartment. For a moment he felt almost glad that no one could surprise from him Ruth's identity or address. And next moment

the fact that he had held her in his arms, only to lose her again, filled him with a madness of grief and despair.

His subconscious mind, however, kept pace with the ceremony. When it came time for the ring, he felt in his pocket and produced it. Trudeau, efficient as always, had insisted that he get the ring out early in the ceremony. "And don't drop it, mind!"

In response to the clergyman's question, Trudeau replied with clearness. His voice, indeed, seemed almost to hold a touch of defiance:

"I do!"

The question put to the bride, she tried to respond, but nervousness or some other emotion caught her by the throat. She gave a tiny, nervous cough that rippled the lace of her veil almost as though she shivered.

"I——" she began with resolution, and stopped.

In the embarrassing hush that followed, Carter jerked from the fog of his own anxieties to the sharp realities of the present moment. Trudeau was staring at the ring in the hand of his best man. Involuntarily, Carter looked down at it. The ring he held was not the diamond-and-platinum gewgaw which Trudeau had entrusted to him. It was the silver-and-turquoise, antique and unmistakable ring which Juanita had worn on her left hand the night before.

How under heaven——

Carter saw now that the bride's glance was fastened on the ring also. She put out a hand waveringly, and her fascinated gaze traveled up Carter's arm to his face. With a shock that turned his heart to a lump of ice, Carter realized that he was looking once more into the gray eyes of Ruth Morton, the dancer in magenta—the Rachel Sedgwick whom Trudeau had won.

Pieces of the puzzle fell into place while he stared into the haunted eyes lifted to his own. The girl who promised herself a year ago to Trudeau; the

girl who, loathing her betrothed, fled to the Engadine, seeking under an assumed name a little respite from the inevitable; the girl who, loving Carter, dared neither yield to her love nor tell him of the chains that bound her to the savior of her father—many things blazed forth distinctly now that before had been but dimly discerned.

In a twinkling the impersonal contempt he felt for a man who could drive Trudeau's bargain turned to a rage so personal, so murderous, that it was all he could do to keep his hands from the bridegroom's neck. This marriage should never take place, not though all of fashionable New York craned and stirred in the pews back yonder, as it was stirring now. Not though the bishop stood with upraised hand, waiting in confused dismay for the bride's reply. Not though he had to kill to prevent it—

Carter took a step toward Trudeau. But the bride herself, as it happened, settled the matter—a trifle unconventionally, perhaps, but at least not outrageously. Even as Carter started forward, even as recognition flamed into her face, the girl gave a strangled cry as if this last torture were not to be borne, and fell in a pool of shining satin on the altar steps.

It was Carter who sprang to lift her before the bridegroom could, and faced Trudeau across the inert burden in his arms.

"I'll settle with you for this!" Trudeau said in a low tone. His eyes were black lightning.

Nothing for years had furnished society with a choice morsel like that provided by the dramatic interruption of Rachel Sedgwick's wedding, and it's consequent postponement. Those who liked Sedgwick too well to see him in Trudeau's power—those of the inner circle who knew or guessed the facts—were both elated and dismayed. Those who decried too many dinners and parties for

a prospective bride were triumphant. One newspaper even had an editorial on the insane whirlwind of social affairs which brings a society bride to the point of exhaustion so that she can hardly crawl to the altar.

For days the collapse of Rachel Sedgwick, now secluded behind the big towers on the Drive and denying herself to all visitors—even to Trudeau, it was rumored—occupied the town as fully as the stabbing of Juanita. The gypsy dancer still lived, half recovering consciousness now and then, whispering a few incoherent words that seemed to deny that she knew her enemy's identity. The newspapers spoke of the wielder of the dagger as her "slayer," for physicians said the dancer's magnificent vitality would snap at any moment. She had received her death wound.

"Poor Ramon—not he!" the gypsy murmured when they brought the Spaniard to her bedside and asked if it had not been his hand that struck the blow. A cryptic message to Ramon, intercepted by the police and then permitted to reach the dancing partner, had almost confirmed the authorities in their suspicion of him. He flung himself beside her bed, poured out a torrent of endearment, groped for her hand—and was led out with a face contorted by what the detectives professed to believe remorse. Only her Roumanian companion, on whose presence Juanita insisted with such vehemence that the physicians dared not refuse, maintained Ramon's innocence.

The police distrusted the old Roumanian woman. More than once they hinted darkly that she knew more than she told. The old Roumanian smiled in sour fashion. Once she gave the briefest of laughs. This was when they asked about Juanita's missing ring. For reply, she flung a handful of ear-shattering syllables at them which, upon translation, proved to be: "It will turn up in time."

This ring of turquoise and silver, cunningly carved, was the one jewel missing from the dancer's collection. Whoever had struck the blow left intact her other gems, splendid though they were. For a time the silver ring, valuable chiefly because of its evident antiquity, was not missed in the excitement incident upon the stabbing. Ramon himself with a cry of dismay pointed out its absence from the dancer's finger, where it had been worn so constantly that little dents from the carving still remained.

"Its significance I do not know," he said, "but Juanita would die rather than part with it."

Reading these things, day by day and bit by bit as they got into the newspapers, Carter grew yet more ill at ease. Certainly the silver ring so precious to Juanita had fallen with the rouge and powder boxes from Rachel's beaded vanity bag that he thrust into his pocket when she had dropped it in her mad haste to get off the street and into the shelter of her home unrecognized. Ironically enough, it lay side by side with the wedding ring Trudeau intrusted to him, and, as fate would have it, the silver ring instead of the platinum was the one his heedless fingers drew forth when Rachel, in her bride's array, stood before the altar. Not so strange that his fingers should have closed over the silver ring, perhaps, for it was the larger, the heavier, the more insistent of the two.

But how had it come into Rachel's possession? Why, with it in her possession, had Rachel been fleeing through the streets, frantic with terror in the growing dawn? And how—the thought became more insistent as excitement over Juanita rose higher each day—how was he to explain his possession of the ring in case the police came to question him?

Beyond a doubt, Trudeau recognized the ring the instant Carter drew it from his pocket. Trudeau even seemed to be-

lieve Carter flaunted the ring with intention, as an insulting allusion, in the very midst of his marriage ceremony, to the Dolores Cenac affair of six years ago. Thinking it over from this angle, Carter could understand Trudeau's fury and his threat, to neither of which he had attached importance at the time. Trudeau, he realized, was a man to be reckoned with, and a man who now believed he had a motive for demanding a reckoning. Carter was aware that, if Trudeau desired it, he could put him in a most uncomfortable position. Suppose, for example, Trudeau mentioned to the police that the ring they wanted was—

It could scarcely escape the newspapers that two unusual incidents attended the prospective Sedgwick nuptials. One was a stabbing which at any moment might turn into a murder. And the other was the melodramatic postponement of the nuptials themselves. Carter thanked Heaven fervently that so far no newsmonger had thought to connect the fainting of the bride with the tragedy of the night before; nor, indeed, to connect the bride herself with that silver-and-magenta dancer for whom the police of New York were searching even now.

He saw that the possibility of connecting them was not after all so great as at first he had feared. The real connecting link was the ring. And no one in that dreadful, hushed pause, when the congregation sat electrified and the bishop stood with upraised hand, had spied the ring in Carter's fingers except Rachel, Trudeau and himself. He dared not get rid of the thing; its importance, for all he knew, might sometime be vital. But he hid it, effectively he thought, in a leather-backed volume of essays that lay, plainly to be seen, upon the table in his rooms.

Rachel, of course, could solve the mystery, at least in part. But Rachel was as securely fortified behind doctors' orders, nurses, and servants, in the

Sedgwick towers, as if she were some medieval princess immured in a donjon keep. To personal calls, and telephone messages, and carefully worded notes, some underling always sent the unvarying reply that Miss Sedgwick was too ill to receive visitors, but that as soon as possible his kind inquiry would be conveyed—and so on. Carter devoutly prayed that his address would be conveyed to her, at least. He must see Rachel, and at once. He must find out what she knew about the stabbing of Juanita. He must learn why the sight of that silver ring struck her with horror, as it struck Trudeau with fury.

Three items in the final edition of the newspapers that evening goaded him to desperation. One was the news that Juanita, sinking rapidly, could not live through the night. Another was the information that Miss Sedgwick had so far recovered as to be able to-morrow to make the journey to her father's Adirondack camp. The third was the discovery, tardily enough, of a policeman who had seen a mysterious couple at about daybreak near Riverside Drive: a woman in a magenta gown such as Juanita's assistant had worn on the fatal night, and a tall man with blue eyes who seemed fond of her. The policeman said he could identify the man.

Carter reached once more for the telephone. If need be, he would talk with Rachel's father. His hand was on the receiver when there came a knock at the door—a surreptitious knock, quick and low. When he flung open the door Rachel stood upon the threshold.

An exclamation of love and pity sprang to his lips. She looked so wan as she sank with heartbroken droop into a chair.

"Is any one here? A servant, or any one?" she asked quickly. "Lock the door, please; I'm in terror of being seen with you." She added, lifting honest gray eyes to his: "For your sake, dear."

His flood of questions she waved

aside, evidently intent on pouring out her story in the shortest possible time and getting away before any one discovered her presence. Carter knelt before her, and she rested a trembling hand on his chestnut hair, stroking it while she talked in fluttering little rushes.

"This is the first time they let me out. I was pretty ill. But at twilight I begged them to let me go for a walk, alone, and I was so much better that they consented.

"At first I was going to telephone. Then I thought and thought, and any place I might meet you—a restaurant or the street—seemed dangerous. This appeared safest of all. If they saw me with you, they might realize that it was you and I whom the policeman—You've seen to-night's paper?"

He nodded. Suddenly she threw her arms about his head and pressed her lips to his hair.

"My dear, my dear! I love you so," she moaned, "and I bring you nothing but agony—"

"No, no!" She checked his movement to take her in his arms. "Let me tell you everything. Time is so short. That ring—you have it yet?"

"Juanita came to me, the afternoon of the day before my—before what was to have been my wedding. You know now, perhaps, why I was to marry Neal Trudeau? It seems Juanita had met Neal, years ago, in Roumania. He had fallen in love with her. The ring you have was her wedding ring. He married her by gypsy ceremony. 'When all other means failed,' she told me. Gypsy girls, you know, will not give themselves to men outside the tribe, ordinarily. But Juanita was mad about Neal from the moment she saw him. He wanted her to run away, but she wouldn't—not without a marriage. Even with the marriage, she became a sort of outcast; her people hate foreigners. She left the tribe and Neal found lodgings for her

in a town near by. In a week or so, he went away. She never heard from him afterward.

"You see, it was only infatuation on his side. But on hers, it was love. She had too much pride, though, to follow him. Dancing was the one talent she possessed. When she became famous, and arrived in America, the first news to greet her was an item about Neal's marriage next day to me."

The girl paused with a long, quivering sigh. But she held up a hand to forbid Carter's interruption.

"So she came to see me. They wanted her to dance at Neal's dinner that night. I was wild with eagerness to believe what she told me. If Neal was really married to this woman—and over there, at any rate, the gypsy ceremony is held to be binding—then I could break with him and still not jeopardize my father's interests. Neal has no pity, no scruples. I said to myself that I would be without pity, too. I'd hold this secret over him as the price of my release. Even if the gypsy marriage were not absolutely binding in this country, he might fear the scandal.

"But simply because I was so anxious to believe her, I had to be sure. She suggested that I watch Neal's face when she unmasked that night. I've had some training in Spanish dances for the Southampton fêtes, and all— It was a mad thing to do, but I was mad with horror of the next day, with joy at my possible escape."

Rachel hid her face, and at Carter's kisses on her fingers she resumed with a pale smile.

"If I had known you were there, it would have killed me, I think. Well, you saw how Neal started when Juanita unmasked. That more than half convinced me. Later, in the dressing room, Juanita gave me her wedding ring—it was in my vanity bag when I met you later, on the street—I was running away from—"

She sat with clenched hands, fighting for composure. How small and defenseless she looked, Carter thought, in the slim little dark frock, her pale-gold hair mocking the shadow of her dark, concealing hat. The gray eyes were almost black in the pallid face. Only the tender mouth, pathetic at this moment as that of a bewildered child unjustly punished, had any color.

"She wanted me to come to her apartment at the hotel, after the dinner was over. I was to confront Neal with her ring. She was going to ask my father, too, I believe, and Ramon, and some others. Evidently she had no time to invite them. She meant to have Neal see me there first, and I'd show the ring and ask him about it; and then the others would come in. That, I think, was her plan.

"So after the dance was over, Juanita went down to her car. I was with her. She sent me back to fetch a scarf she'd forgotten. Ramon was in the chauffeur's place, just as he says. Of course he didn't know who I was. Well, I got the scarf and was coming back with it.

"From the stairs, I could look through the open door, and I saw Juanita's car a little beyond the entrance. The electric lantern in the stair arch threw a shaft of light that touched the car, so that I could see the inside of it—just a corner. As I noticed this, the car door swung closed, softly at first and then with a bang. I couldn't tell who or what closed it. Next instant—" Again she hid her face, while convulsive shudders racked her.

Carter seated himself on the arm of the chair and held her strongly against him till the shuddering ceased. When Rachel spoke, her voice sank to a whisper of horror.

"Next instant, from the lower step, I saw that Juanita was lying across the cushions, and that blood—I thought even then it was blood—was spreading across

them. She looked—she looked dead. I screamed, but at that instant the car started quickly. When I ran to the sidewalk, it had already turned the corner and disappeared.

"For a moment I stood there, trying to think what to do. Then I believe I went crazy, for I remember running, running. I was afraid of being recognized, afraid Neal would find me, afraid of nameless things.

"But all the time there was one comfort. I still had Juanita's ring. I could show it to Neal next day, before we went to the church. It would be a pretext for delaying the ceremony, at least. Can you imagine, Bryant, what I felt next morning when I found that the ring was gone? I thought it had dropped on the street somewhere. And then came news of Juanita's stabbing. Neal himself told me she could not live an hour. When I reached the church the rumor came that she was already dead.

"There seemed then no excuse for not going on with the ceremony, though meeting you, like that, had made me see how much I'd prefer dying, myself. But I had always to think of my father." She scanned Carter's face anxiously. "You don't know how intimidated my father had been by Neal Trudeau. And"—her voice returned once more to a whisper—"and I myself fear him."

Carter took her cold hands in his own.

"Dearest, I haven't as much money as Trudeau. But I have money enough. Neither you nor your father need be so afraid."

She gave him a grateful, hopeless smile.

"No, my dear. Mere money won't help. Neal knows something discreditable—a stock deal—I don't understand it, but I know that, if Neal says the word, my father will go to prison. It would kill him—and me." Rachel looked at Carter wistfully. "There is no escape, Bryant. Not unless we hold

some secret over Trudeau as potent as the one he holds over my father."

Unless! And the one human being who could put the force of corroboration behind that secret lay dying; might even now have breathed her last.

"I'll go to Roumania!" Carter cried. "I'll search for records."

The records of a wandering gypsy tribe!

"Even Ramon knows little of Juanita's history," Rachel reminded him. "Ramon is Spanish, and not even a gypsy. The old Roumanian companion may conjecture but she has no knowledge. She comes from another section of the country. Juanita told me she had kept the secret of her marriage 'locked in her heart and in that of her tribe.' They are like that."

Carter's hands rose to his head in a gesture of frenzied impatience.

"But am I to stand aside helpless and see you married to Trudeau?"

The gray eyes met his, dark with fatality.

"Dear heart, what else can you do, or I?"

The man's shoulders went back.

"This much," he told her, "we can do, at least. We can keep your name out of it so that you will be spared one more agony. Promise me, Rachel, that you will never tell any one else what you have told me."

She hesitated.

"But if the policeman who saw us that night identifies you? I'd tell to save you, come what might."

Carter smiled at her fears.

"Promise me this, then! Promise you will never tell unless I have to ask you for help. Even if they arrest me—" He caught her to him as she blenched. "You must listen! You must do as I say! Ruth"—the old name of a year ago slipped out—"if you love me, promise you will never tell unless I ask it."

"Then," she gasped, "you must promise me that if—"

Visions of Rachel Sedgwick pilloried by the police, visions of her very truthfulness being turned against the girl, perhaps even to the extent of her trial for murder, made Carter brutal. The child did not realize in what peril she stood, as one of the last to see Juanita alive; one of the few with a possible motive for the crime. How easy to brush aside her reluctance to marry Trudeau and charge her with killing Juanita because Juanita seemed to be a rival; or because Rachel feared that the marriage, which was to save her father and his fortune, stood in jeopardy. Clearly Carter saw how the truth itself might twist a noose around that fair young neck.

His grip on Rachel's shoulder made the girl cry out.

"I'll promise you this," he said between clenched teeth, "that, if ever your name is connected with this thing, I'll kill myself."

She grew so white that he thought her about to faint. But his grip did not relax, nor any wavering soften the steadfast cruelty of his eyes.

"Do you love me enough to promise now?" he asked.

An unfair advantage, and he knew it. The girl had been for months on the verge of collapse. The panic of that flight after Juanita's stabbing indicated at what low ebb was her strength. Dazed, terrified, this was no state of mind for judging possibilities or giving promises.

Carter pursued his advantage with a relentless savagery inspired by the very depth of his love.

"You promise?"

Her eyes closed.

"I promise," she said faintly, swaying into his arms.

While they stood there, silent, hopeless, the door handle softly turned. Carter looked at it, unbelieving. It turned again. Then an arrogant voice said:

"Let me in. It's Trudeau."

Mutely Carter pointed Rachel to the room beyond. But, pulling herself together by a superhuman effort, she shook her head.

"Open the door," she commanded.

Her decision might, after all, be wise. Carter opened the door.

An ugly little smile played round Trudeau's full lips as he greeted them.

"Ah, Rachel, my dear! I'm delighted that you have so far recovered as to be able to go calling." He dropped easily into an armchair and helped himself to a cigarette. "When they told me you were out for a stroll, I supposed you might have come here. And, since I wanted to talk to both of you, here I am."

"You supposed Miss Sedgwick was here?" Carter repeated.

Trudeau flicked his cigarette.

"Give me credit, my dear chap, for some powers of perception. It did not escape me, at my almost marriage, that you and Rachel had met before. Her look of recognition fairly screamed that fact." He gave the girl the full benefit of his insolent eyes. "Judging from appearances, you are friends of long standing and"—the look he cast around the room was eloquent of the unconventionality of the meeting place—"rather good friends, at that."

"We are." Rachel spoke with a quiet dignity that surprised Carter after the tenseness of the scene they had just been through. The next words indicated how sure she felt of Trudeau's infatuation for her, and the knowledge gave him a hot pang of jealousy. "I hope you're not going to be vulgar, Neal."

"I hope it won't be necessary." Trudeau retorted. "Matter of fact, I came here to avoid vulgarity. The police called around to ask me some more questions this afternoon. I thought from the trend of the queries that they might be coming to see you, Carter, before long. They're questioning every one who was present at my dinner that night,

you know. So, when I surmised that Rachel might be here, I thought it would look better, in case the police did come this evening, if Miss Sedgwick and her fiancé were found calling on Mr. Carter, instead of Miss Sedgwick alone."

They could be grateful to him for that much, at least. He read the thought.

"Don't thank me. It's in my own interest to protect the future Mrs. Trudeau from scandal. In a minute we can go—before they come."

Carter stirred.

"The police have not questioned me at all, as yet."

Trudeau blew a thoughtful smoke ring.

"Doubtless they will make up for lost time, old chap." He seemed to find a little difficulty in phrasing his next remark. "You— Before they come, do you mind telling me how you happened to have that ring?"

"I can't tell you that," Carter replied.

"Juanita has good taste," Trudeau conceded, "in rings." He could scarcely pretend not to have recognized the jewel.

"Juanita has good taste—in rings," Carter conceded before Trudeau could notice Rachel's little gasp; "if she selected that ring herself, as seems unlikely. In other things, her taste, perhaps, is not unerring." His eyes were insolent as Trudeau's.

"Seems unlikely?" Trudeau repeated negligently.

"Unless it is the habit of Roumanian brides to select their own wedding rings?" Carter suggested. "Perhaps you can tell me the gypsy custom in that case?"

He saw Trudeau's hand clench.

"Really, I couldn't say. I've never attended a gypsy wedding."

Carter laughed mirthlessly.

"Juanita tells a different story."

Trudeau, putting down his cigarette, buttoned his coat with the involuntary gesture of a man going into a fight. But he did not rise. Leaning forward,

his black eyes stabbing into Carter's face, he said with deadly calmness:

"Suppose you tell me Juanita's story."

"I? Surely you can better do it—ah—justice. You are her husband."

The man's gaze shifted to Rachel where she huddled in a chair.

"You believe this?" he asked.

Rachel nodded.

Trudeau turned again to Carter.

"I thought you might have told Rachel something of the sort—from motives which are easily guessed. The thing is not entirely clear to me. But this much is clear: Rachel will marry me within a week."

The girl threw out her hands.

"Neal!"

"Within a week," Trudeau repeated.

"This gypsy ceremony of which Carter likes to gossip isn't binding, even though I admitted that it ever took place."

White scorn filled Rachel's face.

"What do you consider binding?" she inquired.

"Your obligation to me," said Trudeau, and did not quail before the contempt in his bride's look. "Moreover, even if I admit the gypsy marriage, I'm practically a widower by now." He let the callous remark sink in before he added: "And that removes any possible objection to my marriage with Miss Sedgwick."

Gauging the man's cold arrogance, Carter sent up a prayer of thankfulness that Trudeau had not the faintest suspicion of Rachel as the dancer in magenta. At least the fellow should not have this additional lash to his whip.

Into the silence following on his words came a pounding at the door.

"This will be our friends, the police," Trudeau hazarded.

He was right. The first to enter the room proved to be the patrolman to whom Carter had spoken that night near the Drive.

"That's him," the burly officer said; "lightish hair, blue eyes, tall; know him

anywheres." He added gratuitously: "He was having a pettin' party with a girl in funny clothes, with dark hair." Carter realized that the dark scarf had hidden Rachel's blond head, as the black mantilla had concealed it during the pantomime. Score one, on the side of safety.

The man in charge, a plainclothes detective with an ingenuous, boyish grin, nodded to Trudeau. The suspicion that Trudeau might have helped turn the police in this direction came to Carter. Still, he would have been questioned sooner or later, no doubt.

"How are you?" Trudeau asked with proper nonchalance. "My fiancée, Miss Sedgwick, and I wouldn't have called on Mr. Carter if we'd realized he was going to entertain you fellows, too." Trudeau's tone was ruefully humorous. It held exactly the proper note. Even Carter felt grateful to him, for Rachel's sake.

"Got to ask questions of everybody," the plainclothes man said genially. He turned to Carter: "First we're going to step over to the hospital. Juanita's conscious now and then. We'd like her to see you before she goes."

It sounded sinister, but there was nothing to do except acquiesce.

"One moment!" Trudeau's black eyes shone with hatred. His words, "I'll settle with you for this!" came back to Carter. "One moment, officer. If you search these rooms, you may find that missing ring of Juanita's."

Carter stood aghast at the sheer audacity of it. Was Trudeau trading on the certainty that Carter would endure much rather than involve Rachel—through Trudeau—in an unsavory scandal? Was Trudeau afraid Carter meant to tell about the gypsy marriage, and was thus forestalling him in an attempt to discredit any unwelcome disclosure? Or was Trudeau impelled by motives as yet obscure?

The detective wheeled sharply.

"Is that true?" he shot at Carter.

For reply, Carter shrugged indifferently.

"Search as much as you like," he answered and found an opportunity to dart a warning glance at Rachel. While the detective and the patrolman made havoc of the well-arranged furniture and books Carter strolled over to the smoking stand and filled his pipe. Leaning against the table, the book of essays hidden by the edge of his coat, he watched the search, deigning no look at Trudeau, giving Rachel now and then a reassuring smile. She sat like a marble image, her eyes dark with fear.

More plainly than he hoped she could see it, Carter visioned the possibilities. They would say Juanita had given him the ring. The magenta dancer had thereupon killed Juanita. Or he himself, in a fit of jealous rage over—well, Ramon, for example, had stabbed the dancer and fled back to her magenta rival. Oh, the possibilities were endless.

On the other hand, if they did not find the ring they would put Trudeau's accusation down to mere enmity. No harm done.

The detective with the boyish smile, his face serious now, paused in the search.

"No time to finish this," he decreed. "Juanita may die any moment. We will go to the hospital first, and search the rooms later."

Waving them toward the door, his hand struck the table. Carter jumped to retrieve it, but the book went clattering to the floor. And, from the fluttering pages, spread wide in falling, rolled the silver-and-turquoise ring.

Rachel screamed. The detective, picking up the volume, looked at Carter almost with admiration.

"Clever trick," he commented. "Maybe you're a little too clever, eh?"

Trudeau laughed.

At the hospital, whither Rachel in-

sisted on accompanying Carter, and whither, against his own half protest, the detective asked Trudeau to come also, they had to wait a minute while restoratives were given the patient.

"Wonderful vitality," the doctor told them, coming from Juanita's room; "she can be only a hair's breadth from death, when life flares up with amazing strength again. I've told her you were here. She wants to see you all. But this flare is about the last. Juanita is nearly gone."

Their visit to the sick room was brief. Juanita, reduced to a pair of enormous dark eyes in a tiny, waxen face, looked at them listlessly beneath falling lids.

"Not he," she said when they insisted that she look up at Carter. "I do not recognize him. No!"

Carter wondered if this were true. She said the same of Rachel, whose face she knew well. Perhaps it was a generous lie, to save them trouble.

Upon Trudeau she bestowed a long glance, but said nothing. When they held the ring before her eyes she gave a sad glimmer of a smile. Yes; she recognized it. Her ring. The Roumanian woman slipped it on the dancer's finger.

As they tiptoed from the stark, white room, the still figure on the bed followed Trudeau with her shining, weary eyes. Somehow the Roumanian woman got between him and the door, slipped out behind the others. Trudeau and Juanita for the instant were alone.

"Neal!" The whisper from the bed was a mere breath.

The man stood uncertain, and then—

impelled by those magnetic eyes, wide now and pleading—he moved toward the bedside. Ghosts of that summer in Roumania rose before him. Here lay dying the woman he had loved, briefly but consumingly. These were her magnificent eyes that begged for kindness; these were her beautifully chiseled lips that strained upward for a last kiss.

Nobody was at the door. Trudeau bent above that silent form, happily unaware of the boyish detective—not boyish now, but tense and vigilant—who listened outside.

"I did not tell them who stabbed me," Juanita said faintly but audibly. "You are perhaps a little sorry for it now, my husband? I did not tell them it was you."

Her eyes lured him, as they had lured him that summer long ago. Strange triumph of a woman already within death's shadow! Love leaped up in him anew, as life for the instant flared in her.

"Nita, my dearest," he cried, and spoke an endearing phrase in the Romanyn tongue.

"So? You love me again?" Juanita sighed. "Let us stay so, always."

Ramon, or it may be the Roumanian woman, had brought her the gift she asked. In a blazing up of the vital force, Juanita lifted herself to meet her husband's lips. One arm stole around his neck, and the other crept from beneath the coverlet to plunge in his back the little stiletto Romany keeps for those who break faith lightly.

"We should—have music—for this,"
Juanita said. And died.



MANY of us would hardly feel abused to endure the royal pinch of poverty after the manner of the Empress Zita of Austria, who, though "dead broke," runs a household at the rate of five thousand dollars a month.



WILL Queen Elizabeth's stately starchiness be revived now that fashionable femininity has taken to wearing ruffs? A noted actress arrived recently from Europe wearing a white ruff six inches tall bewitchingly bordered with black velvet.



Songs Without Words

By Augusta Coxe Sanderson

Author of "In Defense of the Weak,"
"Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks," etc.

THE whole burden, the worry and the uncertainty of the affair, fell upon two people—the bride, Cynthia Hungerford, that was, and her husband's best man, Paul Latham, who gave her what help he could.

Not the burden of the wedding proper, that scene of shimmering beauty, which was all that loving forethought, a bountiful purse, and the intelligent service of decorator and musicians could make it—that went off perfectly, except for two minor occurrences which passed practically unnoticed at the time. It was only when viewed in the light of what developed afterward that they attained importance.

The Darcy-Hungerford wedding was one of those huge church affairs, too large for the limited capacity of the building, where the door men have to be vested with the powers of pseudo-policemen to keep out the curious and the undesirable. Firm and polite they must be in their demand for cards of admission, or, in lieu thereof, the sanction of an obliging usher before guests can be admitted.

But, even so, it transpired afterward that in some inexplicable way an uninvited woman, so heavily veiled as to be unrecognizable, had gained entrance, and had made her way well forward in the middle aisle upon the arm of one of those friends of the bridegroom who had been busy for half an hour, dividing the fashionable of Washington into Montagues or Capulets, and seating them accordingly.

The first unusual occurrence was just at the moment in the marriage service when the bishop looked with all confidence over the heads of the equally confident pair and said:

"If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

Cynthia, keyed to a high pitch of nervous sensitiveness, was conscious of a slight stir in the middle aisle just behind her. But when she turned her head ever so slightly there seemed nothing amiss. She thought, of course, she had imagined it, especially as no one mentioned it, that day or later.

The other incident occurred when they were signing the register. She had insisted that this be done in the old-fashioned way, in the church. She had just stepped back, and Bertie was adding his name, when a heavily veiled woman pushed her way past Paul Latham, and spoke to her hurriedly, in rather blurred English:

"You have got him. But I shall get him away from you, if it takes ten years."

The words were so low that not even Latham, standing close by, could hear, and she was gone before any of the others noticed her presence. For only a moment did Cynthia lose her composure, evidenced only by a surprised clasp of the hands. Then, perfectly poised, she resumed her smiling compliments to Paul and the others for planning the whole affair so well.

The reception passed off without event. There was the usual crush. Diplomatic and official Washington was there, and the old friends of both families. Cynthia was by far the prettiest bride of the season, and Bertie one of the most popular of the younger crowd in the foreign service, and there was a host of friends to wish them well. They departed upon the honeymoon, and the wedding was over.

Soon after the young Darcys came home Cynthia sent for Latham. She had come to realize that the whole fabric of her married happiness was threatened.

"There is something on my mind, Paul. I can't tell Bertie. I won't tell my own family. I am not sure that I ought to tell even you."

Poor Latham! He had become in the past few years almost a professional best man, and he wondered, in view of Mrs. Darcy's seriousness, if she were going to follow the example of one or two of the brides of his erstwhile happy bridegroom friends, and hold him personally responsible for the outcome of the ceremony.

"I meant to speak to you about it at the reception, but——"

"Well, frankly, Cynthia, I am glad you didn't. I had my hands full. Poor old Bert had no sense at all. He was worse than most. It was all I could do to get you away in time. But everything went off well, didn't it?"

"It was lovely, wasn't it? But——"

Cynthia's adversative preposition was arresting. She had made up her mind since that day not to mention it, but she had found that she needed help. Who so acceptable as Paul? He was Bertie's oldest friend, and it was he, too, who had introduced them.

"It is that incident in the vestry room; that foreign-looking girl who spoke to me. I never saw her before, I am sure."

Frankly she repeated what the girl had said.

"Crazy, of course!" Latham flouted her seriousness. "They often show up at big weddings. They seem to have one of two complexes: Either the bride is a long-lost daughter, or the bridegroom is a former lover. That is old stuff. Hubert has never been ractety like a lot of the fellows. We know that. She probably never saw him before in her whole life."

"You think not?" Hubert's wife was pathetically anxious to be reassured. "I sometimes wish he were going back to Roumania."

"Well, I don't. He had trouble enough to get himself transferred here after he met you, and there's heaps—Roumania! Oh, by Jove, it gives me an idea!"

"What?"

"I'll bet she came from there. Looked foreign, didn't she?"

She clutched at the suggestion.

"Can't you see the Roumanian minister, or—or something?"

"What good would that do? We couldn't bind her over to keep the peace, could we? You are perfectly able to keep old Bert in line, I am sure. Not that he is in any danger of stepping over. If ever I saw a chap completely gone, it is Bert. Why, from the very first minute he saw you there in the Park——"

"Yes, I know."

The love affair of the Darcys had been swift and certain from the start. Hubert had been home from the foreign service on furlough after a few creditable years in the smaller positions in London and Paris. Then he had been given a more important post in South-eastern Europe; he had done excellent work, and risen rapidly, giving great promise.

When he met Cynthia riding one glorious spring morning through Rock Creek Park with Latham it was all over, as he said. He asked for and received transfer to the state department in

Washington, and plunged into work there with his old-time enthusiasm, stirred anew by the realization that there were two for whom he must succeed—himself and Cynthia.

"What else have you got on your mind, Cynthia?" Latham asked.

"You will think this is foolish, but I got an anonymous letter. The usual sort, I suppose. It came several days ago."

"What was in it?"

"A friend advised me to watch Bertie. He was not at the office as many hours as he claimed. I was astounded, swept off my feet. And yet—it isn't unexpected."

"What do you mean?" Certainly Latham had not anticipated such a remark.

"Oh, not what you are thinking," Cynthia laughed ruefully. "I am not suspicious of Bertie. Nothing of that kind could alarm me. But ever since the first time I saw him I have been afraid. It has been too good to be true, too beautiful to last. I have been too sublimely happy. Envy, jealousy, death—something will snatch it from me."

Latham leaped to his feet.

"Cynthia, you are not a fatalist," he cried. "You can't sit down and allow some mysterious 'something' to take away your happiness! It is too real. We have got to fight."

"I knew you would help," she answered gratefully. "But what shall we fight? If we only had something real, something tangible."

And there was the crux of the whole matter. A veiled foreign woman and an anonymous letter—nothing more.

It was hard enough, as she pointed out, for young people in these restless days to maintain any great degree of serenity in their lives. Even if they did not go in for the gayest, the wildest of the amusements spread for their choice, existence itself was geared high,

whipped almost to a jazz tempo. Barbaric elements were constantly cropping out; raw methods constantly confronting them.

They agreed that nothing must be said to Bertie. Not for the world would she have him know that anything had occurred to distress her.

In a few days Latham reported that he had scraped acquaintance with the Roumanian minister, had hinted that he desired to meet some of his countrywomen, mentioning vaguely a costume ball Eleanor Crossett was planning.

"All serene there," he assured Cynthia. "Some of them knew Bertie in Bucharest and liked him, but there is nothing more."

He added that he would "sound old Bert," if she thought best. But this she forbade.

"You are probably right," he conceded. "And I doubt if he would tell me, even if there were anything. I have noticed when a man marries he gets terribly close-mouthed—about things that concern his wife and about things which don't."

"That is why I hate all this best-man business. It seems to be the end, the swan song of delightful companionships between men. A chap is himself, confidential with his chum, dependent, helpless—woefully so at the time of the wedding. But when he comes back from his wedding trip he calmly looks me in the eye as one who says: 'Nothing doing, old man. I've changed masters.'"

Cynthia laughed as he hoped she would.

"I don't believe there is anything to tell." But there was a wistfulness in her tone which troubled Latham.

The day of Eleanor Crossett's dance came round. Cynthia had laid out her wedding dress in readiness, sighing romantically that she could not also wear the veil, feeling as all brides do the regret that its shimmering, symbolic beauty can appear but once in a lifetime.

She was waiting for Hubert to come to take her for a round of golf when he telephoned that he could not get away, and had asked Paul Latham to take her instead.

Paul found her with puckered brow. "Something wrong! I said I wouldn't worry, but it is happening rather too often. The other day when he pleaded business at the office, I called him immediately afterward about a telegram from his mother and he was not there. I don't like it. I am going to call him now, just to make sure."

"No!" Latham thundered at her. "Bert is all right. No suspicious wife rôle for you, my dear. You must not!"

She looked at him for a long moment and put back the instrument.

"You are right, Paul. I am getting to be a perfect cat."

They had a good, stiff game in which Latham had to look to his laurels, and then they played a few extra holes. Cynthia's cheeks were blooming as they drove home.

"You are awfully good to us, Paul," she said on the way. "You deserve the best wife in the world."

"All the nice girls marry the other chap," he mourned. "I'm only good for best man."

"The best ever—oh, what is that?" She caught his arm.

Down near the bridge they had been held up by a terrific tangle. Caught at right angles to them was a familiar car, just now splashed unfamiliarly with Virginia mud. Cynthia was staring at the occupants. Darcy was driving, his eyes straight ahead.

Beside him, lounging proprietarily against him, sat a young woman, very dark haired, her locks roughened by the wind. Women smoked sometimes in the Washington streets, but not the women who were accustomed to ride in Hubert Darcy's car, and the hand which now flicked cigarette ash over its low-hung side was ungloved, and not well kept.

Surely, Bertie was a fool, to be going about Washington with this—this—Confound the girl, couldn't she disguise her feelings? • Other women, Latham didn't doubt, had been in love with Hubert Darcy, but they were, at least, well-bred enough not to make such a pitiful exhibition of their infatuation.

Cynthia was silent as they drove home.

"I would have given an arm to save you that," Latham said simply as he helped her out.

"Bless your heart, Paul," she answered bravely. "I'll just have to think things out alone. See you to-night." She waved her hand with as much gayety as she could command as he drove away.

She was not greatly surprised to receive a message from Hubert saying that he could not get home before going to Mrs. Crossett's, but that he would come there as early as possible, and hoped that she would go early and have an enjoyable time. She was glad that he gave the word to the maid, and saved her the torture of hearing his explanation.

Pride forbade Cynthia Darcy's staying at home as she longed to do. She dressed with extreme care and drove alone to Crossways, where Eleanor Crossett was giving her beloved annual party.

Heir to long-established custom in Washington, Mrs. Crossett was obliged to entertain much of the year in the usual official fashion, asking those whom she must, and planning carefully that only those who were persona grata should come together under her roof. But upon this one night in the year she asked only those whom she really wanted, and she, as well as her guests, found it the most delightful of her many affairs.

There was always a sprinkling of diplomatic and official Washington, but, for the most part, they were her own

personal friends, come for an evening of relaxation.

"I can ask the dearest of enemies, if I want to, and they can come or not, just as they choose," she was wont to say of this, her beloved occasion.

As Cynthia drove up she was delighted to see that Latham was just arriving alone.

"Bertie was delayed," she explained. "He is coming later. I have something to tell you."

He found a small, deserted reception room, and looked anxiously at her.

"I got another of those horrible letters." She handed him a square, white envelope with her name written in a firm hand, obviously a woman's.

"It came by post, but I haven't opened it. I won't have my evening spoiled. Just when I had things thought out, and had got myself feeling pleasant and forgiving again."

Latham turned it curiously in his hand.

"You open it," she urged with sudden reversal of decision.

"Let's burn it. What's the use of—"

"Open it!" Her tone was peremptory.

There was a single sheet bearing a gold crest at the top, with a short note, but signed, he noticed quickly.

Thank you so much for loaning me your husband for this afternoon. He has been too good in undertaking my poor affairs. I am looking forward to making your acquaintance as soon as he can bring you to see me. Until then, my dear Madame Darcy, I am, yours faithfully,

SOPHIA DE L. D'IFALDA.

There was a queer, foreign flourish at the end of the name.

"Sounds harmless enough to me." Latham passed quick judgment in order to dispel any possible alarm on Cynthia's part.

"But I haven't loaned Bertie to any one. He said it was business. You saw yourself they had been somewhere

on a long trip. Bertie is always most particular about the car. I believe it is to worry me, just as the other one." She fished in her beaded bag for the first one. "They are the same, you see. Compare them! The same paper, same writing. But the first has no crest and no signature."

"It can't be," Latham persisted, "unless——"

"Unless what?"

"It can't be!" he repeated, not wishing to put into words his sudden thought which was a preposterous one. "Unless she is running with the fox and hunting with the hounds."

"Well, we must not stay gossiping here," Cynthia said, after a silence, "we must go in. Wait a moment! I must just powder my nose."

While she, with saving femininity, added a few unnecessary touches Latham looked at the note again. Could the woman they had seen write it? The insulting threat in the church and the first letter were more in line with her seeming capabilities. The hand flung over the side of the car and the brain under the towseled dark hair—could they indite and frame the urbane sentences on the fair, crested paper of the afternoon's missive?

And yet, they had seen her, hadn't they? She had said he had been about her "poor affairs," hadn't she? Surely, Hubert Darcy had something to explain.

"Here we are," Cynthia announced, fair and smiling once more. She had dressed her blond hair high in an effort to appear matronly, but had succeeded only in looking more youthful in the shimmering bridal gown.

Mrs Crossett was chatting informally as they entered, and came swiftly to greet them. It was plain that Cynthia was a favorite.

"I am so glad to see you, dear. But where is your friend? I am so anxious to see her."

"Friend?" Cynthia was obviously at a loss to understand.

"The Roumanian lady, isn't she? Or is she Russian, or Italian, perhaps? Hubert didn't say. He telephoned a few minutes ago, asking if he might bring her. What is her name? I didn't catch it."

"Oh, yes; Miss d'Ifalda!" Cynthia was herself again. "I am glad she found she could come. I didn't know—just at the last. Bertie has been delayed. I am sure you will like her."

And as soon as she could she moved away, leaning a bit more heavily on Latham's arm.

"What does it mean, Paul?" she questioned when they had reached a comparatively isolated spot in the dancing floor.

"Well, as they are coming here, I suppose we shall soon find out." In his voice was a tenderness for her and a determination that Hubert should explain.

They strolled about, danced once or twice, and greeted their friends.

"I wonder who the old gentleman is?" Cynthia indicated a slender, foreign-looking man with Howard Barnaby, her husband's superior in the department. She had not long to wonder, for Barnaby came over to ask if he might present the Count Fansa, unofficial representative of the tiny kingdom of Balatva, off to the southeast of Europe.

"Oh, Balatva!" said Cynthia enthusiastically. "I should love to meet him."

They made an interesting contrast as they stood under the portrait of Eleanor Crossett's ancestor, the signer. Although Count Fansa had spent his early years on an isolated estate in the mountain-flocked fastnesses of Balatva, he had managed in his maturity to see life in many capitals, to become a part of it. The urbanity, grace of Old-World courts was in his manner, his accent, as he bowed over the hand of the young Mrs. Hubert Darcy, the girlish wife of

an as yet inconspicuous member of his country's service.

"Won't you tell me about Balatva?" she asked, sparkling in response to his courtliness. "My husband was there once when he was stationed in Roumania, and I hope to go there sometime."

The count looked at her shrewdly, as if to see whether she had a real interest, or were simply bent upon making polite conversation.

"I am almost a man without a country, madame." His smile was one of pathos as he bent above her. "The history of Balatva is a tragedy. We are almost at our end, nationally."

Cynthia looked her concern. How different he was from the usual representative of the smaller countries, who tried to impress America with the greatness of his nation.

"I am not in America to beg assistance, madame," he hastened to assure her. "It is a personal, almost a private quest which brings me. One of the very few, perhaps the only service I can render my country and my former sovereigns."

"Your former sovereigns?"

"My king is dead, and the prince refuses to assume the throne."

"Is there no one else? No nephew or grandson? No one? What a pity!"

"For a republican, madame—" he reminded her, smiling at her young enthusiasm.

"Oh, yes, but I am fond of old institutions, of history that has been made. That old man up there"—she pointed to the signer—"he helped to set up standards that we are glad of the obligation to carry on. I cannot imagine a prince, the heir to a throne, refusing—"

"But our prince is an old man, madame. He was too long kept the crown prince, held fast by king and ministers, cooling his heels outside the circle of affairs, chafing and idle. He had the mettle for a world figure, but

they gave him no outlet for his tremendous abilities. It was a crime to keep such a man within the petty boundaries of Balatva, restricted to hunting in our puny mountains, fishing in our tiny lakes——"

"But, even so——"

"My prince can do no wrong!" he quoted smilingly. "I may say, since I have said so much, that he is not altogether to blame. There is an inexplicable something in the Balatva line which crops out at times. God alone knows what strange heritages have been swept together to flow in their veins. A small country, fought over since the beginning of time—we have the fiery tempers, the romantic passions, the complexions, and the marked abilities, of conquerors from the West and the East. There is in the best of us a—shall I say, a 'kink,' 'a worm i' the bud?'—which prevents our clear vision, makes our reasoning not as other peoples'. The prince is not the first who has done an unusual thing."

"But has he no son?"

"There is a daughter only." A curious reticence crept into the tone of the old man who had been so frank. "It is concern for her——"

The count's glance had been the first to wander, his attention fixed upon a group chatting with Eleanor Crossett. Cynthia followed his gaze, and saw Hubert Darcy presenting to his hostess a tall, dark woman, dressed in white, a woman of queenly bearing.

"Oh, there is my husband, Count Fansa," she exclaimed. "He has brought a guest. I must speak to her. Will you come, too?"

"In a moment, if madame will pardon me. I am most anxious to pay my respects to the husband of so charming a sympathizer as madame has shown herself. But in a moment, if madame will be so indulgent."

And without seeming haste the count slipped beyond the next group and was

lost to sight before he had caught the attention of Cynthia's husband and his companion.

"Come, Paul," Cynthia Darcy said. "I shall need you for this meeting."

There was a slight hesitation as she went to meet her husband's guest.

"She is very beautiful," she said as she swept on to meet the woman they had seen in the mud-splashed car.

As Mrs. Crossett turned her attention to other guests Darcy carried off the introductions with an aplomb she could not but admire, however much Cynthia might regret.

"How splendid you are to-night, my dear!" he said to his wife with an affectionate smile. "I have brought Miss d'Ifalda. I want you to know each other. Her people were most kind to me on the other side."

His wife's control was perfect. One might have thought that husband and wife had discussed the charming visitor over many conjugal breakfast tables. She extended her hand and said graciously:

"Thank you for your note. It arrived just as I was leaving to come here. It is an unexpected pleasure to meet you so soon. You were at my wedding, I think?"

Latham braced himself for the reply.

"No, I had not that pleasure." Her voice was low, her English imperfect. "I arrived only in time to hear everywhere of the beautiful wife of my friend, Monsieur Darcy." She smiled up at Hubert, without, this time, the affection the others had seen in her face this afternoon.

It was the same woman without a doubt, but with a difference. It was as if, in the afternoon, she had been off guard, herself, a bit elemental, a beautiful, natural animal. But now, in making her official appearance, so to speak, she had put on with her white gown a complete gloss of sophistication, an armor of accomplishment and grace.

"It is good of you to allow me so much of your husband's time," she continued. "My poor business has been very stupid. And he hardly knew me, too. We met only a few times in Balatva——"

"Oh, Balatva?" said Cynthia for the second time that evening. "We have just met the most charming Balatvan, the Count Fansa——"

If a bomb had exploded upon the floor of Eleanor Crossett's very circumspect dancing floor, Darcy and his guest could scarcely have evinced greater surprise—or alarm.

"Count Fansa in Washington?" Hubert seized his wife's arm, all but shaking it in his excitement. "You have met Count Fansa? Are you sure? Where?"

"Here, to-night. Paul met him, too, just a moment——"

But she was not permitted to finish her information.

"He must not see Miss d'Ifalda, really. It would be most unfortunate. Look after Cynthia, will you, Latham? I must take Miss d'Ifalda away. I shall be home as soon as I can, Cynthia dear, but don't worry. It will be all right."

His final sentences were delivered over his shoulder as he hastened after the lady, who needed no urging to flight.

Cynthia and Paul stared in amazement. Neither had failed to realize the completeness with which Hubert Darcy had attached himself to the chariot of Miss d'Ifalda. She was the first to frame the question.

"What do you make of it?"

"I am not a member of your husband's highly useful and mysterious profession, Cynthia dear. For which I humbly thank the gods. It makes mountains out of molehills and turns perfectly intelligent chaps, like yonder, into theatrical lunatics, if you ask me. But, no doubt, it will all be explained. It always is. Plausibly explained—and pigeonholed."

Cynthia laughed. In spite of her worry, she could still see the ridiculousness of it.

"But, frankly, since you ask me," he continued, "I make neither head nor tail of it. But I saw the count, standing near where we left him, taking it all in. I'd give something pretty to hear his side of it."

"Let's go ask him!" she suggested audaciously, taking his arm.

"I was just coming in search of you." The count bowed in greeting. "I am most anxious to meet your distinguished husband."

"I am so sorry that he has been called away rather unexpectedly," she answered evenly. "He hopes to meet you very soon. He is most interested in affairs in Balatva."

"Of that I am quite convinced."

Was it double-entendre? They looked at him quickly, but there was no trace of sarcasm upon his kindly features.

"I mean," he added quietly, as if in answer to their unspoken question, "that I am aware that Monsieur Darcy has already been approached by others who are interested in the matter which brought me here. I know, upon inquiry, that I may speak before Monsieur Latham as to madame herself?"

When she nodded acquiescence he continued.

"You may wonder that I do not go direct to the state department. I speak, instead, to some one far more discerning, some one more clever, more sympathetic to the all but invisible shadings between honor and dishonor than any department of any state. I speak to madame." He bowed. "I speak to a woman who loves her husband, her husband's honor, more than life itself. Is it not so?"

He paused, waiting, as Latham said later, "to let that sink in."

"Madame will soon—ah, very soon, perhaps—have opportunity to test the

truth of my words. Madame's husband is in danger. Clever hands are even now all but at his secrets; clever eyes all but peering into matters he is pledged to keep hidden.

"Madame does not understand? Monsieur does not?" He looked at each puzzled face in turn. "May I say, that before the set of to-morrow's sun you may understand—something may occur. I make no accusations. I trust to madame's intuition. If my words, watch, consider, prevent, come back to her, I shall be content."

The count withdrew with the courteous air of one reluctantly giving place to the friends who had more claim upon Mrs. Darcy's time than he.

Cynthia marveled at the cleverness of the man. She linked with his speeches the gestures, the inflections which had accompanied them. Harmless enough, colorless enough, yet he had accomplished more than his words really said.

Without mentioning a name, without definite accusation, by nothing so crude as a lifted eyebrow, nothing so definite as a shrug, subtly, without saying so, he had given Darcy's wife to understand that, through Sopha d'Ifalda, Darcy had been given the wrong end of things Balatvan; that she was deliberately planning his undoing.

Albeit veiled, his words had told, his manner evidenced, no less than Sopha's precipitate flight, the complete lack of faith between them. These two tiny atoms, detached from a distant, infinitesimal state, of which Cynthia had not thought seriously before to-night, floating here in the surcharged atmosphere of official Washington, were working at cross-purposes, one with the other, involving in their struggles the honor of Hubert Darcy.

Latham's first words assured Cynthia that he, too, had got the import of the unspoken warning.

"Well, whatever it is, I am on his side."

Cynthia spent the remainder of the night in deep thought. She was determined not to incapacitate herself by worry. She realized that she was in no position to advise her husband, technically trained as he was, in the conduct of his affairs. She must do nothing to thwart or embarrass him. And, yet, only by trusting him could she help, if the count's warning were really justified.

"My dear," Hubert greeted her next morning in the sunny breakfast room. "I owe you an explanation, an apology."

"Bertie"—she smiled up at him confidently—"you remember, that when I married the department I took those three Japanese monkeys for my mascot: 'Hear no evil; speak no evil; see no evil,' and I added: 'Think no evil.' You owe me no explanation, dearest."

"You are a brick, dear!" He kissed her hand above the grapefruit, and gave no explanation.

"But I have wondered"—she smiled mischievously—"if the count overhauled you last night, after all your haste?"

"Did Count Fansa leave Crossways? Early, I mean?" Again Darcy gave the impression that he spoke the name of a real enemy.

"He watched the whole affair," she answered. "Paul and I spoke to him again, and he left almost immediately."

"In that case, I must telephone to see if he has annoyed Miss d'Ifalda."

But in a moment he returned to say that she had not seen nor heard from the count. He added that her whereabouts had probably been discovered, and, if so, the count might cause them trouble.

"He has annoyed and opposed her at every turn before she came here, and we found only last night that he had followed her here. But, if we can avoid him until after to-night, he can do nothing. If you see him again, dear, be careful what you say. He is very clever."

"Considering that I have been kept in ignorance of—everything, there is little I can betray." In spite of herself, her pride, and determination, the sleepless night, and all that had gone before, told upon her control, and she felt a trace of bitterness creep into her protesting voice.

"But I offered to tell you the whole thing!" Hubert protested.

"Not until this morning."

"And you have met Miss d'Ifalda."

"Not until last night, and this has been going on a long time—weeks, in fact."

"Going on? What do you mean?"

Her husband looked aghast, but she could not be sure whether he was surprised at her knowledge, or at her construction of the knowledge.

"I don't know what I mean, Bertie. I only know that I don't want to quarrel with you. I won't. I will not be jealous, narrow. But I am afraid—afraid for you."

"Dearest"—Darcy held her in his arms for a long moment, his lips pressed against her hair—"you know, don't you, that the first, the cheapest weapon in the hands of so-called national agents is to incite suspicion, jealousy in the hearts of our women? But surely Count Fansa would do nothing so crude?"

"No! No! He made no mention of that possibility. But since you have spoken of it yourself, it is true. I mean she is in love with you. I saw her look at you." Not the evening before was in her mind, but the day in the car when she had been completely off guard.

Darcy shook her as he held her.

"You don't know what you are saying—thinking. You don't even know who she is."

"Who is she?" she demanded, her head thrown back to face him.

As if involuntarily, Darcy looked about to assure himself they were abso-

lutely alone. The moment gave her time to recall her words.

"No! No! Don't tell me anything!" She put her fingers across his lips. "She is your old friend, and you are trying to help her."

"No, dear, not an old friend. I don't really remember actually meeting her, although she says I did. But her father showed me some attention. I am only repaying courtesies. But it is a tremendous stake I am working for, and it was good of old Barnaby to let me undertake it, instead of an older man in the department. We are trying to carry out the promises we made at the end of the war to help the weaker nations against the aggression of the larger powers of Europe.

"I have papers in my possession—think of it, dear—which, if they got into wrong hands, would cause death and disgrace to hundreds of men; even the downfall of governments, perhaps."

"You don't carry them about with you, do you?" Anxiously she felt his pockets.

"Of course not!" he laughed. "They are safe in the vault. Fortunately no one knows I have them, and I am not publishing the fact."

"But you will be careful, won't you, dear?" She thought of the "clever hands, the clever eyes."

"Oh, yes, certainly. But you are not to worry. To-night will see the end of the business, I hope, and the papers will be returned to their rightful custodian, who declares, by the way, that they were stolen from him. He will be most welcome to them, I assure you."

It was tea time, and Cynthia had spent a restless day, waiting near the telephone for any message from Hubert, hoping, fearing, she knew not what. She was relieved when Paul Latham appeared, comforted that he knew something of what was in her heart, but he took her cue and said nothing of it.

They were chatting quietly when Hubert came home, looking worried and rather downcast.

"We have just had the conference—rather, the first half of it. I have brought Miss d'Ifalda until to-night's session. She is very tired."

"You did exactly right, dear." Cynthia rose in welcome. "Tea is just coming in."

But Miss d'Ifalda refused tea. She looked weary, as if overcome by emotional stress.

"If I could lie down, madame? You are very good."

Cynthia took her upstairs, wheeled a couch before an open fire in her prettiest room, brought her negligee and slippers, and begged to be allowed to send dinner upstairs. She tiptoed out, urging her guest to rest until she should be called.

"Poor woman, she is worn out," Cynthia said sympathetically.

"She is terribly disappointed," Hubert told them. "I am afraid it is going against her. The other side staged a surprise, with more promised for to-night. After all the work we have done, too, racing all over Virginia, trying to round up committeemen to get them here to-day. Probably been better if we hadn't. My car's a wreck. You didn't know that, did you, dear?" He smiled at her through his fatigue.

"By the way, dear, I brought home those papers to save going to the office vault. I shall need them to-night. They will be safe here in the table drawer for an hour or two."

"Oh, do you think so?" Cynthia stared curiously at the outside of the package, a vivid orange envelope of sturdy texture and voluminous size. Curious what exteriors could hide such dangerous documents!

"Nobody knows I have them. Of course, they will be perfectly safe. I shall be glad to get rid of them to-night."

They watched him as he placed the envelope in the drawer of an old Tudor table, and turned with relief to the tea tray.

"Make it strong, dear. I have had a whale of a day."

Was that a step on the stair? Apprehensively Cynthia went out into the hall. Nothing! No one in sight.

Tea revived Darcy's flagging spirits, and he was rallying Latham as she re-entered the room.

"Seen your friend the count to-day, Paul?"

"You were not poking fun at the count last time I saw you," the other was quick to retort.

"Well, things have changed to-day. I have no further cause to fly at his approach. Know what the count reminds me of?" Darcy crossed his knees the other way, and settled back with a fresh piece of toast. "Used to be a Dresden-china group in my grandmother's parlor when I was a kid—Lady in a swing under a Dresden tree, Watteau shepherdess idea—and there was a man swinging her—satin breeches, lace ruffles—you know. There was a tiny brass key, too. Wind them up and he would push the lady in the swing. Awfully fascinating thing for a kid to watch. But the most interesting part of it to me was the way he used to creak at the waist. Push—creak. Push—creak."

"Oh, come, now, be fair!" Latham laughed. "The count is genuine enough."

"Sure!" Darcy grinned. "Just thinking about the group in my grandmother's parlor."

"You are just a naughty boy, Bertie," Cynthia scolded; "jealous because Paul and I met him first."

"Yea-ah, that's it!" he yawned, "I'm done up. Think I'll just lie down for a while before to-night. Be prepared to go down to defeat—with honor."

He left his wife and Latham to sit

chatting over their cups telling fortunes by the leaves, avoiding the subject nearest their hearts, until the maid came in to clear away.

"Come, play something, Cynthia? Something sentimental and dreamy: I don't feel up to anything modern," Latham suggested.

As she turned toward the piano in the far end of the long room she heard again the small sound which had disturbed her earlier. But again there was nothing to be seen. No one there.

"Do you think those papers are quite safe there in the drawer?" She opened it and took up the orange envelope, turning it curiously in her hand, examining the official cord with which it was tied. "I shall be glad when it is in its proper custody."

When it was restored to the drawer, and she had looked apprehensively into the hall once more, she went to the piano and began to play softly not to disturb the weary guest upstairs. Latham lounged near by, smoking comfortably.

"Oh, madame plays Mendelssohn; the 'Songs Without Words,' my favorite. One hears him seldom, nowadays."

Count Fansa stood before her with the maid who had admitted him.

"Oh, will you have tea, Count Fansa?" Cynthia asked, provoked with herself that his bow reminded her of Hubert's cynical "push—creak." "We will have in some fresh."

"No, thank you, madame. I have only a moment, I—I wanted to speak to you——" He hesitated pointedly, and Latham discreetly vanished.

"I know that your husband has returned. I have but a moment. Please pardon my abruptness. I know that he carried certain important papers with him to this house. Remember my words of last night. That orange envelope, madame—it belongs in my portfolio, intrusted to me by certain persons of importance in Europe. It was—ah—ab-

stracted from my portfolio and given to Monsieur Darcy. In seeing it, possessing it, he is blameless. He is deceived. Clever hands are at work, madame. Older, wiser public servants than he have not always been able to tell the genuine from the spurious.

"Their honesty, their love of fair play, has sometimes been imposed upon to gain nefarious ends. To-night, if that paper is—ah—in wrong hands, there will be disclosures; regret; I may add, dishonor.

"Not only my country will suffer untold harm, but a warm-hearted, upright citizen of a disinterested and altruistic government will be ruined. Your husband, madame, is too young, too promising, to be sacrificed, carried down to ruin in another's fall. I should regret to see it."

That was all. He turned and left the room, and Cynthia sat bowed upon the piano bench. Again she marveled at the cleverness of the old man. Again he had delivered to her his unspoken commands, had given her to understand without definite words, that she was to obtain possession of the papers and return them to him. By threats, under veil of sympathy, she had been challenged, warned, to seize any opportunity which offered to save her husband's honor.

How fortunate that he, with all his prescience, had not known that the envelope lay within easy reach in the drawer of the innocuous-looking Tudor table!

For a fleeting moment she doubted the whole thing. It was too theatrical. But Bertie was young; he was inexperienced. Barnaby should have put an older man upon the case, should not have sacrificed him because Sopha d'Ifalda had seen him in Balatva and cast eyes of desire upon him.

Something—a sixth sense, perhaps, or a reflection in the polished surface of the piano before her; certainly it was

not a sound—impelled her to turn her head. There, in the far end of the room, beside the Tudor table, stood Miss d'Ifalda, fully dressed for the street, wide awake, the orange envelope in her hand, hastily unwrapping the cord.

Swiftly Cynthia crossed the room and snatched the envelope before the other was aware that she was not alone.

"Miss d'Ifalda!" she cried in amazement.

"Royal Highness, from you, madame!" The other turned haughtily and spoke with supreme contempt as she held out her hand for the paper. "The Princess Sopha Irina of Balatva is not accustomed to such *gaucherie*."

"A thousand pardons, your highness!" Cynthia swept a low courtesy, one of old Monsieur Drouillard's best. "But my husband is most anxious that these papers remain undisturbed."

"Your husband—bah!" Her contempt became rage. "He bungle everything. From now I take the papers. I manage for myself. He—he fail, the fool American! So cold, he is, so respectable. He have no gift for the affairs, no flair. He never rise. He keep his feet on the ground—in the mud. Sopha Irina, me, I have stoop to love him, at home and here, but he—'I am marry,' he announce!" She mimicked him disgustedly. "From now I manage."

Cynthia held the bulky envelope behind her, ignoring the hand the other extended, wishing, hoping that Hubert would come, realizing that, if it came to a physical test, she would be no match for her guest.

"Ah, madame has accomplished my commission!" Both women turned in surprise at the count's voice. "She has the papers for me already?"

"You are absolutely certain that they are yours?" Cynthia asked dubiously.

"Absolutely, madame. And her royal highness"—he bowed to Sopha Irina—"will not contradict me. It pains me,

my dear, to ask it of you, but can you honestly assure Madame Darcy that they are not mine? Be frank!"

She glowered at him in silence.

"Or that they were not stolen from me in the first place? Or that Monsieur Darcy does not know that they are mine?"

Realizing that she was beaten, Sopha capitulated, but gracelessly.

"What does it matter, if I cannot have them? Certainly he knows they are yours, but I had——"

"If madame will be so kind?" Count Fansa held out his hand imperatively. Cynthia, a bit uncertain, placed the orange envelope within it, accepted his murmured thanks, and watched him as he swiftly left the house.

"I, too, will bid you good afternoon, Madame Darcy." Her guest spoke in icy tones.

"Oh, I am so sorry for it all. Hubert will be—oh, Bertie!" She ran to her husband as he appeared upon the stairs.

"What is it?" he asked with the bewildered air of one roused suddenly from sleep.

"Madame found me at your table, Monsieur Darcy, and at once she believe the worst. She make a scene. I leave your house." She tried to save some rag of dignity to cover her chagrin.

Darcy looked anxiously at his wife.

"She snatch it from me—from me, Princess Sopha Irina. The jealous cat! She ought to fall on her knees in gratitude that the princess have enter her door, that she have condescend to wipe her boots upon the fool American husband. So virtuous, he is, so——" Her shrill voice broke.

Cynthia began to see clearly. The lovely Balatvan was jealous. That explained her following Darcy to America—the warning at the wedding.

Darcy restrained Cynthia as she was about to speak.

"Remember, dear, she is our guest. In this house we extend diplomatic immunity—of sorts." He smiled wanly.

"And what do you think the little fool have done with the papers? She snatch them from me. Yes, I am a woman. I have stoop to notice her husband, she think. Would I look twice at such a—such a provincial? But she—oh, with such a willingness she have hand the papers to Count Fansa!"

"You gave that envelope to Count Fansa?" Darcy rushed to the table to assure himself that he had heard aright. Limply he felt for a chair and sank into it. "You don't know—you can't guess what harm you have done!"

"Why so?" Cynthia demanded. "He said they were his. She said so. Even you said——"

"That was this morning, dear. You might as well have allowed her"—he nodded at the guest—"to keep them. I learned this afternoon that she had tricked me. She is not the Princess Sophra Irina——"

A derisive laugh interrupted him, but he patiently continued.

"She is an impostor, masquerading from the beginning. She was not afraid of the count; that was only a clever ruse. They have worked together, meeting secretly. She was to work through me, he through you, to gain possession of those papers."

"Yes!" Sophra exulted. "You find out at last—you so cold, so respectable American husband? Not one little kiss, even! Ah, you make the mistake. Had you not been so cold—so unfeeling—I would have refused Fansa's offer for the papers. I would have helped you. I

would have made for you a great career. Now—you shall save yourself! And your wife and the Count Fansa—so successful with the ladies, the count! How do you know?"

Darcy's clenched hands showed his emotion. For himself, for his failure, he ignored her contempt, her taunts, but for Cynthia——

The latter surprised them both by laughing.

"That little uncertainty, Miss d'Ifalda, will be cleared up when the count opens the envelope, I imagine. If he believes me fascinated, he will learn just how completely when he sees what is inside the envelope."

"What—what you mean?" Sophra turned upon her, fear in her eyes.

"Paul Latham took the papers the orange envelope contained to Mr. Barnaby." She looked at her wrist watch casually. "Yes, just half an hour ago. Mr. Barnaby will see that they get to the conference without fail to-night. Then they will be returned to the proper person, whoever he is."

"That is not true!" Sophra insisted. "American bluff! I know. I have feel the papers inside."

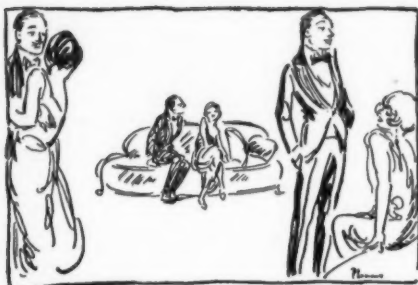
"Oh, I put something else in their place—something he will be interested to find, perhaps." Cynthia's eyes sparkled with triumphant mischief.

"Cynthia, what did you put inside?" Though Darcy tried to speak sternly, as befitted such tampering with the secrets of the state department, his tones betrayed consummate relief.

"Two sheets of piano music—Mendelssohn's 'Songs Without Words,' to be exact."



WHAT do men talk about? What do women gossip about? Or do men gossip as well as women? A survey of random chatterings revealed that "business" is the most popular topic among men, with "sports" next, and "other men" third. As a favorite topic of conversation with women, "men" by far outranked "dress" and "other women."



Salvage

By Izola Forrester

Author of "The White Moth,"
"A Café in Cairo," etc.



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Jack Willard, fleeing from the horrible publicity of the Grant murder case in which he had been suspected, met on the *San Salvador*, bound for South America, Harley Jordan and his daughter, René. He was able to protect her from the unwelcome advances of Maurice Dysart, and when the *San Salvador* went down in a tidal wave Willard got René safely into a boat. Later, in midocean, apparently the sole survivors of the wreck, Willard told René his story and was surprised to find that she, too, had a secret that preyed on her. Just before the ship went down Dysart had accused her father of being a notorious international jewel thief, and she had seen them struggling for the possession of a diamond necklace, said by Dysart to be the spoil of a famous robbery the year before.

Picked up at last by a passing ship, René and Willard, saying nothing of the love that had grown between them during those days of peril, both went their separate ways.

René, on her return home, discovered that Jack Willard was really Stuart Ames, son of a wealthy friend of her aunt, and that the woman involved in the Grant case was Margot Kelmscott.

Many months later, Ames, unable to remain in his self-enforced exile, returned to persuade René to marry him. René, however, feeling that her duty was to retrieve her father's imperiled reputation, refused to consider immediate marriage, and Margot attempted to renew her ascendancy over Ames. Recognizing Dysart at Margot's dinner party, masquerading under the name of Sandro di Brescia and plotting an attack on Margot's pearls, René and Stuart threatened him with exposure. He asserted, however, that at the first move on their part he would tell all he knew of Harley Jordan, and prove his statement by sending a diver down to retrieve the necklace in Jordan's dead hand.

CHAPTER X.

AS they walked together from the boathouse after Dysart's departure, Stuart's advice was to deal with him openly, to warn Margot of her danger, to notify the police of Dysart's society masquerade as Sandro di Brescia, to take the risk of any comeback from him. The very fact, he argued, that Dysart was wanted on two continents as an international jewel thief would discount any charges he might bring against Herley Jordan's memory. Yet against this, René urged the chance that the steamship company would be successful in its attempt to salvage the *San Salvador*, and her father's guilt

would be proven by the discovery of the stolen necklace in his dead hand.

"It's one chance in a thousand," Stuart told her, "that they are ever able to find the boat. It lies, probably, caught on the volcanic reef that was blown up by the seaquake. The heavy winter tides may have already set it free and let it sink to the bottom of the Atlantic. Be reasonable, René. Don't let this man terrify you. If you'd let me deal with him then and there, I could have made him see light mighty quick."

"He was armed," she answered. "You wouldn't have had time to act before he shot you. I tell you, you have to meet a man like that with his own

weapons. I would be willing to give every dollar I possess to keep him from exposing my father. He would keep his word, if we attempt to show him up here. Even if you went to Crosby Kelmscott and told him you believed Di Brescia intended to steal Margot's pearls, what proof could you give? He would bargain with the police, if we gave him up. Even if they proved that he was Maurice Dysart, he would still strike a bargain with them, offer to uncover the whole international jewel combine of crooks. He would tell them that my father had been the head, the brains of a group of men who moved in the highest circles of society and finance, who carried out great jewel robberies in this country, and disposed of the goods abroad through himself and Fessenden. Then he himself would gain immunity, and what would the world say of Harley Jordan? You blame me for hesitating, for wanting to hold him off, but you don't know what it means to me. It rests solely on my choice—the whole horrible responsibility."

"Beloved and beautiful"—he took her hands, compelling her to stop and face him for a moment—"you're just a little hysterical fool over this. You need not take a step toward exposing him. Let me do that. Did you hear what he told you about the other man on the raft who escaped with him? It was the understeward Nevins, who was friendly to us, who helped me save you. He's probably in New York now, held as a witness by the company. I want to go down and see him myself. He saw, as I did, the attack on your father by this man. He can get all the information that I need on what they have found out so far."

"What do you mean?" She felt suddenly quieted as she looked up into his confident eyes.

"I want to know all that the steamship company has found out; where the wreck is; how deep it lies under water;

and just what their plans are. I can do it in a couple of days, and you will be safe here. He wouldn't dare start anything openly. Do you mind if I go, dear? I'll be back Friday."

"In time for Mrs. Brookes' dinner?"

He laughed as they strolled up the cliff path together.

"I'm not even invited. She's too good a friend of my mother to notice me now. What does it matter between us, René, after all we have weathered together? Nevins and I could go down to the wreck in my yacht, if we have to, take a diver with us, and do the whole thing before the company have a chance to get their salvaging outfit here. Why, I could blow the boat up with a depth charge, for that matter—the same kind they use for derelicts. I know the whole trick of it. I was on a mine destroyer for a time during the war, and I can get a depth charge from any salvaging company. There's one near here at New London. I tell you there's nothing to fear, sweetheart; nothing that I can't fight for you. You can take your choice—send a diver down to get the necklace, or blow the boat up before they get to it. It's easy."

"Easy?" She smiled back at him sadly. "When you send a diver down, you have another witness. When you pay Nevins to go with you, he works against the steamship company and lays himself liable to action."

He laughed at her.

"Dysart's all wrong when he called you a brigand. You're scared stiff to do anything against the law. Then forget all about it, and leave it to me. I love you and want you, and you won't marry me until you've cleared this up. Will you?"

"Don't, please!" she pleaded. "Give me time to think it over, Stuart. You'll be gone two days or more. Perhaps—oh, I don't know. I wish I could go with you and share every bit of danger with you. It is all for my sake that you

take the risk. I'm all right here, of course. Dysart wouldn't dare to trouble me. He is after Margot's black pearls. Wouldn't I love to warn her!"

"She'd never believe you. Crosby might; I'm not sure. Don't put yourself in peril by telling anything—not yet. Take care of yourself until I can get back to you. You can reach me by wireless, remember, yacht *Huntress*, Long Island Sound, through any telegraph station."

They were halfway up the winding cliff path when René caught the beat of galloping hoofs along the sand behind them. It was low tide, with the wet beach sound and firm. Ted and Guy passed on their lighter mounts, lengths ahead of the two other riders. Yamato was slightly behind Margot. There was nothing to read in their two faces as they came by at an easy canter. Margot wore black riding breeches, a white polo shirt open at the throat, the sleeves rolled above her elbows. Her lips seemed a vivid touch of color in her cream-white face; her dark eyes saw the two figures on the cliff, and recognized them instantly. She smiled and lifted her chin with a quick toss of her head as she passed.

"I wonder if they saw Dysart leaving the boathouse," René said. "I've never seen her riding along here except at sundown with the two boys. How lovely she is! But what a strange expression—startled—no, expectant, as if she were going toward some inevitable thing she feared."

"Margot is a very clever actress," Stuart answered curtly. "I'm not one bit interested in her expression or expectations."

She was silent for a few moments, secretly amused at his outburst, then she said slowly:

"You know, you really need not say things against her to me. I've always thought that was unfair. She had her hour, didn't she? You did care for her

then; surely you must have, to have killed some one for her sake."

"I struck him because he accused me of having an affair with Margot, which was a lie. I admired her, but I don't believe she's that sort. She's daring and experimental. Crosby neglects her and leaves her alone for months at a time when he is off on his diplomatic junkets. I never meant to kill him. I struck at him and he fell against the stone lantern, I told you." His tone was oddly impersonal. She saw that he looked after Margot and the Japanese with frowning eyes. "If I thought for one minute," he went on between set teeth, "that she was being held up by that slinky-eyed devil on any blackmail stunt, I'd head him off right now."

René drew in a quick, deep breath, her lips shut close, her whole heart and mind in a tumult at his sudden reaction toward Margot at the one time when she needed his love and aid. When they reached the drive where his car stood she spoke impulsively:

"I'm sorry I ever asked you to help me, ever got you entangled in my troubles, when you have your own pet tragedy always with you. If Margot needs you, why don't you go to her and offer your help—again?"

The pause was hardly perceptible, but he caught it, and swung around in the car, his hand on the wheel.

"Will you come with me, and marry me in New York, or anywhere you like? There's no other woman in the world, and you know it. You only say this to devil me into telling you again that I adore you and no one but you."

She drew back from his outstretched hand, and shook her head, not trusting herself to speak. Still, as she walked away toward the tall stone entrance gates to the Towers, his challenge had been a satisfying answer to her suspicions of the moment. She turned and waved to him as he drove away.

As soon as he reached Tod Kingsley's

spacious bungalow he called up the yacht and gave sailing orders for noon that day. It would be better to make the trip down to New York on it, in case he decided to stop off at New London and get a depth charge from the salvaging company there. As he was preparing to leave an urgent call came for him. No name given, the smiling Chinese house man announced. He answered impatiently, and heard Margot's voice at the end of the wire, its low, vibrant tone still with the old contralto timbre to it he had once thrilled to hear.

"Stuart? I want to see you."

"Sorry; just leaving for New York." His cheerful finality was a deadlock to his own desire to hear more.

"But I must see you before you go. It's absolutely necessary, unless I meet you, perhaps, in New York——"

"You won't, Margot," he cut in tersely. "I'm returning in a couple of days and am tied up for that time on business appointments. Terribly sorry! What do you want to see me about?"

A pause; then her voice, very soft:

"Nothing, thanks." She had shut off the connection. He stood puzzled for a moment, looked at his watch, and did exactly what Margot had hazarded he would—made for the waiting car and sent it speeding back to Shadow Lawn. It was a great, white Colonial house set far back among trailing willows and rows of poplars. The hot July day seemed to lose its power behind the cool shadows of the lofty-columned portico. The place seemed deserted at that hour. Crosby had gone back to New York the first of the week. The boys were down at the beach with Yamato. She was alone, except for the servants.

He waited impatiently for her in a long, narrow room opening on a terraced garden, a room of silence and seclusion, with its locust-green silk walls and Korean chairs and settee of hand-carven red lacquer. When she entered noiselessly she seemed a startling

anomaly, in her ultra-modern gown, white silk and silver broadcloth, no jewels, the whole effect so severely plain as to appear conventual. Her face was even paler than usual, her wide eyes shadowed in violet, as if she had passed a sleepless night. She evaded the skeptical look in his eyes, and took the offensive.

"Why did you have to come here? I was afraid that you would——"

"You knew perfectly well I would when you called up. What is it? Yamato?"

She relaxed into the high-backed chair that arched over her, fanwise, and lowered her head slightly, her chin on one palm, watching him in a pose he remembered well.

"Why do you treat me this way, Stuart?" she asked with a restrained pathos that had its own particular appeal to any man. "You are a man and have the gift of outgrowing events; in fact, you slipped away and escaped everything. Now you are back, and have washed your conscience clean. You did not even let me know that you were here until I happened to see you."

He stood lounging against the open casement, smoking lazily, listening to her with unbelief in his eyes.

"Why don't you answer me? Did you ever consider that people surmise and conjecture, even if juries exonerate? I went abroad for a while, but Crosby insisted upon my coming here this summer." She paused a moment, and Stuart's gaze was attracted to the cigarette she took from the white jade case hanging from her belt. Fitted into a holder of silver filigree and turquoise, it sent out a peculiarly aromatic odor that stirred latent memories in his mind.

"Why did you go to Demarest's that night?" he asked quietly.

"I was not there. Stuart, why can't you believe me?"

"I know that you were there." He spoke with controlled surety. "So does

Yamato. You are careless to continue smoking the same brand, just as you are careless in having this Jap here in your employ. You go on the principle, I presume, that the queen can do no wrong."

She gazed out of the open doorway at the green-and-gold world of the shadowed garden, her eyes somber with resentment and hurt pride.

"I sent for you because I needed your advice, and you come here to accuse me."

"Presuming that you were there," Stuart pressed his advantage," that you were concealed somewhere in his apartment when I followed him there, then you were a witness to what happened; you know whether he died from the blow or fall after I struck him, or whether his death resulted from some other cause. The wound on his head might have been caused by striking the corner of the stone lantern, or being struck from behind by some blunt weapon. If I believed that you knew the truth, Margot, I swear I'd go to Crosby myself and lay down every card before him."

She smoked with long inhalations, and seemed to regain her poise.

"Go to him if you like. Your sense of the dramatic was always exaggerated. Do you suppose that I care what Crosby thinks? I was not there that night. Besides, you have this new interest which has brought you back North. You do not care for your own sake; you want to drag this thing out and prove, prove, prove anything, so long as you are cleared in René Jordan's eyes." She waited for an answer and he looked at his watch impatiently. "I sent for you because of—Yamato. I was there that afternoon. He saw me, of course. I waited for Demarest, thinking I could persuade him to give me my letters. He telephoned from the club that he was dining there. Yamato said he had been drinking, so I did not wait to see him. That is all I know. I left around five."

"Why have you got that Jap here?" His tone was curt and without compromise. "Is he blackmailing you with the letters?"

"Yes!" Her voice was low. "Don't speak so loudly. I don't want any one to overhear us. He found them before he turned in the alarm that morning."

"How did he know that Demarest had them?"

"Why—I must have told him that afternoon. I offered him a reward, if he could get them for me. You don't understand, Stuart, I was absolutely desperate."

"You must have been." His tone was ironic. "You were playing Demarest and myself at the same time, and Heaven knows how many more. I think I had a few letters also, which I gave back to you. You are the type of woman who will have the wildest, most erotic affairs in letters, and sneer at the man who loses his head over you because of them. I don't see yet why you had to take this Jap into your household."

"I knew you'd say that," she said musingly. "You went away, and Yamato could have implicated me. Instead, he protected me; he never told that he had ever seen me there; he swore it was an unknown woman, and my name was not brought into the case. His price of silence was just this: that he should see me every day, should live in my home as a member of my household. Don't ask me why, Stuart. You know quite as much about it as I do. He is no more to me than the dogs or horses—not so much, since they are useful. But the boys like him, and he never really annoys me; he only watches me incessantly. I believe he has an idea that he is here to protect me. Ted announced the other day that Yamato had called me the 'Sun Woman,' and had told them a story of how the Sun Woman must always walk abroad in splendor and safety. Quaint, isn't it?"

"Just why did you send for me to tell me this?" Stuart asked.

"I thought that you might suggest some way for me to get rid of him."

"Not twice, Margot." He smiled back at her with steady eyes, untouched by the appeal. "I made a fool of myself for you once. It nearly wrecked my life. If Yamato has your letters, you may stake all you've got that he's not here for any adoring, altruistic motives toward his Sun Woman. He is going to hold them over your head as long as it suits his purpose, and afterwards—who knows? Why don't you go to Crosby and make a clean breast of it? He's the cleverest lawyer in New York—"

"Crosby!" she rose with a quick, involuntary sigh. "No, hardly that. You don't know him as I do. I'd rather die than see him arch his eyebrows at me and expatiate on the frailty of women. To each of us our special little inner torture chamber. I'm sorry I asked you to help. Perhaps you would, if you were alone, with only yourself to consider."

"If I had been alone, I would never have come back." He stopped at the sound of voices outside in the entrance hall—a woman's voice arguing with careless insistence over the butler's remonstrance. The next moment Viola Langley tapped at the door and half opened it, without waiting for an invitation to enter.

"I had to see you, Margot dear," she began airily. "Absolutely imperative, I told Haskins. The midsummer-night fête needs you as chairman—" She paused seeing Stuart. "I thought you were alone. How are you, Stuart? Toodle along, so I can talk to Margot."

She turned her back on him deliberately. Margot extended her hand, her farewell tinged with a delicate touch of intimacy.

"Good-by, Stuart. Let me know as soon as you get back, won't you?"

He left with a feeling of irritated failure. She had a subtlety of method which evaded direct attack, and still left an after effect of cumulative suggestion. All she had told him about Yamato seemed magnified into reality once he was away from her. He longed to go after the Jap, to force him to come across with whatever he was holding threateningly over her, but René's claim came first.

Three quarters of an hour behind her sailing time, the *Huntress* started down the bay from New York with the thoughts of two women following it. Margot, behind the locked doors of her own rooms, lay face downward on a couch, dry-eyed, with aching temples, and fear holding her with slowly increasing force. Not of Yamato, but of Crosby's plump, astonished face, if he ever read the letters she had written to Demarest, of his contempt and ridicule.

René watched at her windows overlooking the bay for the black-and-silver yacht, restless, doubtful of the outcome, even if Stuart found Nevins and got the information he wanted. She went down to luncheon feeling dreamy and aloof, desiring, above all else, silence and reflection, and finding, instead, Mrs. Langley waiting with amused eyes to tell of her encounter of the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

René listened with an indifference that was assumed. That Stuart should have left her after his assurance and arguments, and gone straight to Margot for what must have been a prearranged meeting, seemed to her a proof of all she had been suspecting. There was the old bond between them, the old understanding in which she had no share. She wondered whether Eve had ever seen the shadow of Lilith as she walked through her garden.

"And she pleaded ill health, my dear, fancy!" Mrs. Langley concluded

"Margot, she's the image of gorgeous fitness."

"Do you think so? I thought she looked bored to death," René answered.

"A pose, very becoming and essential to the line of her throat and chin. Mind, don't mistake me, dear, I'm very fond of Margot Kelmscott. When others have gossiped about her I have always maintained that Crosby was sufficient cause for any woman's faring afield to see if spring still brings blossoms. But she was not herself at all this morning. She was nervous and agitated, and Stuart Ames looked like a war horse, precisely, or do I mean a war mask? I can't bear these tall, athletic boys with intense eyes and heavy jaws. They have a frightful propensity for tragic and awkward affairs, that never turn out properly. I hope that you are keeping him in the safety zone. I don't like your being seen with him, René, strolling along the beach before breakfast, and that sort of thing."

René listened with a noncommittal shrug of her slim shoulders. Oddly enough, she felt a wave of sympathy toward Margot. It was quite natural that she should reach out to Stuart in anything connected with their mutual risk. Any woman, who has held the supreme place in a man's heart even temporarily, feels that she has established a secret entente for all time. She herself was more or less of an intruder into the drama where they had played the leading parts.

She turned with eager relief to Conningsby Brookes when he arrived that afternoon. Sitting with him over tea on the sea-view porch, her eyes regarded him almost tenderly.

"You know, old dear, it's delicious to find you looking so beautifully fit," he said happily. "You revive, if I stay away long enough, don't you? Dolly came up a couple of days ago to see that things were moving along. She's all hepped up over the dinner she's giving for you. Asked me for details on how

I was coming along with you, and I told her it was a chronic affair. She's a grand old pet, really, but don't let her worry you. You don't think we could be married by fall, I suppose?"

"Never, Connie," she smiled back. "Tell me what they've done about the *San Salvador*."

"Don't bother your head over that. They're still meditating, that's all. Sent a scout ship down there, I believe, hunting for the reef under the second mate's direction, with experts on board to see if salvaging was possible."

"And they're not back yet?"

"No! Why don't you ask Crosby Kelmscott. He's a lawyer, you know, for the steamship line. He'd have all the latest dope for you; probably glad to hand it over. You know, René"—he leaned forward, eying her closely—"you do look wonderful to me. You've thrown some of the worry, haven't you, coming up here?"

She laughed.

"Connie, you're a terrible joke as a mind reader. I'm worried to death. Don't you want to forget that you think you are in love with me, and be my dear old pal and talking oak—some one I can let loose on, and find comfort and advice?"

"I've been the safe and sane stand-by for some time, dear. Old Reliable, you know. Go ahead!"

"You asked me who the man was that saved me, remember? I did not know his real name then, but he has come back. Now, wait"—as he started to speak—"he is Stuart Ames. You'll find it out from Aunt Vi, anyway, and I'd rather tell you myself. He was on his way to South America after the Demarest case."

Conningsby was silent, his lips shut in a level line.

"Just what do you want me to do—enthuse or mourn? I don't get your angle, René."

She hesitated.

"I don't want you to do anything, Connie, excepting to help him get back. I may marry him."

"That's why you stayed away a year, isn't it? I might have known, if I hadn't been in love with you myself. Why did he stand for it? Why didn't he follow you back here in the beginning? Five days on the ocean in a lifeboat together, and you race half a world away from each other as soon as you're rescued. What's the idea?"

"I'm still trying to find out, Connie," she said musingly. "But I wanted you to know."

"Sweet of you! It doesn't frighten me off, you know. I shall still tell you and everybody else interested that I expect to marry you in the fall. You don't want a man like Stuart, dear. You want peace and some one who loves you, who shields you from any more trouble."

She laughed back at him.

"The picture isn't one bit alluring. I'm afraid I like the crimson streak in the rainbow, after all. Why are some women stalkers, Connie? They mark their man, and go after him, and land him, don't they?"

He stared at her in bewilderment.

"What's come over you since you came back, and what the devil do you mean?"

"Don't count on the fall or on me," she said quietly. "I don't know myself what it is, Connie, but I can't get back into the old groove here. I don't like it. I've got the taste in my mouth of the salt spray, and the wind and the freedom of it all. I want all the money I can raise in the next few days. I may go away."

"I presume this is why your father handed me the reins," Conningsby told her steadily. "He believed that I could manage you. So do I. You'll not get your money to toss overboard and watch the bubbles come up. I don't like Ames as a traveling mate."

"No?" She smiled back at him. "Well, I've warned you, haven't I?"

He ignored the warning during his stay. Against her own will or desire, she found herself thrown in his company constantly, in a round of midsummer entertaining. Mrs. Langley was infatuated with her charity fête, and left René to her own whims. Margot had refused to act as chairman, but had donated her beautiful grounds for the affair, and was giving a dinner before it. It seemed as if she had deliberately sought to assemble elements that would combat fusing, people whose presence together would rouse banked fires. She made no secret of inviting Stuart Ames—this with Sandro di Brescia acting as an ardent shadow wherever she was seen. Crosby would be up from New York for the affair. Mrs. Langley and René—it promised to be more than interesting, she thought, with the corners of her mouth lifting in a slight smile.

The fête would be held on the beautiful grounds of Shadow Lawn. On the sunken lagoon below the terraces a group of gondolas clustered about the high Venetian landing place with its tall, tinted piling. Mrs. Langley spent most of her spare time over with Margot in consultation with artists and carpenters.

The morning before the fête, René was called on long distance from New York. She found herself listening to Stuart's voice resentfully, when he announced that he would be there that night.

"Why do you make a special trip?" she asked.

"I'm not," he protested. "I tell you I've found out all I wanted to know. I can't explain now, dear; you know that. I'm stopping off at New London, and will come up from there."

"In time for Mrs. Kelmscott's dinner?"

"Yes!" He seemed to detect the slight change in her tone. "Why?"

I've cleared everything here. The report was negative, do you understand? That means they will abandon the scheme to salvage the boat."

"Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't be coming back, would I, if there were any doubt? See you to-night, then."

She had gone out for a long ride in the motor boat afterwards, against Conningsby's protest. He complained about her attempting to drive the big, racing model alone, and she had laughed at him. Jordan had always been a keen sportsman, and had taught her to follow his lead like a boy. It rested and toned her nerves to feel the boat leap under her control out into deep water away from the golden cliffs. When she returned she was ready to bathe and sleep heavily like a child. When Mrs. Langley came into her bedroom, to see if she was dressing, René stood before the long Chinese mirror, with her English maid, Sims, awaiting compliments for the result.

"Clever, my dear, clever!" Her aunt nodded approvingly. "Sims, you have a touch that is Continental, positively unique. That Chinese crape gives a heavenly line. Cream white with your hair and eyes—you look like some one—I can't think, but I'm sure it's a Greek. Of course, you will do as you please, but I feel this is an hour of fate for you. Connie may not be picturesque, but he is stabilized. What jewels are you wearing?"

"None," René answered briefly. "That's hardly a recommendation for a husband, is it?"

"Not at your age, darling; but at mine, believe me, you look for safe landings. Try emeralds." She took the necklace from Sims' hands and held it to slip over René's head. They were oblong stones, brilliantly cut, set deep in pale, antique gold. "They are older by centuries than Margot's black pearls. You may as well rouse her envy. I

wonder, really, if anything could rouse her. She seems in a perfect apathy."

René waited until the last moment, expecting that Stuart would call up as soon as he arrived in Newport, but no word came. When she reached Shadow Lawn she found him already there, talking with Crosby. Margot, in filmy black chiffon over metal cloth, her rope of black pearls twined about her long, slim white throat, stood with Dysart and others, her gaze straying back to Stuart's face restlessly. Crosby scrutinized her.

"Glorious creature, isn't she?" he said. "Never get tired looking at her. Feast for the eyes and soul. Always should wear royal jewels, I tell her. Di Brescia's got his eye on a blue diamond that was in the turban of the nabob of some place or other—the chap that said to some other chap: 'Change turbans, old man.' Forgot who told me that—Englishman, I think. Understand Conningsby's going to marry the Jordan girl. It would do old Harley good, wouldn't it, to watch the kid step into places he never got a chance at?"

Stuart heard and winced inwardly. It explained several things—René's manner toward him, her indifference when he had spoken with her. He saw, too, the meaning of Margot's little half smile when she had watched Conningsby. He wondered whether she had invited him purposely, to give him the opportunity of hearing the news before her. He tried to speak alone with René before they went in to dinner, but found it impossible. He was placed at the other end of the table from where she sat, close to Margot.

To René it seemed like some fantastic dream, that they three should meet conventionally at such a time and place, that they could sit there in this company, each with the other's secret in his or her power. The dark eyes of Dysart held no apprehension. He glanced now and then at the face of René and back again to Stuart, with a peculiar, musing

interest. Once he met her glance and smiled slightly, the flash of fire gleaming under his long lashes. He had no reason to fear opposition. With two objectives ahead of him—Margot's pearls and this girl who feared to open her lips and save herself—he could look upon the entire scene with security, and amusement at the credulity of the world at large.

It was Crosby who spoke in a slight lull of conversation. He had arrived on a late train from New York, and was particularly benign and preoccupied.

"By the way, Brookes, they are going after the *San Salvador*. Have you heard up here?"

René listened with a curious sense of release, as if she had escaped into disembodied lightness, and was above them all—these laughing, protected, careless ones, who could not know her agony of spirit as she listened. Stuart sought to catch her gaze and failed. Dysart observed in an undertone to Margot that the sea was very deep; it was ridiculous to think of ever recovering anything at such a point.

"Aren't you mistaken on that, Mr. Kelmscott?" Stuart asked. "I'm just back myself to-day, and the last report was against the plan."

"So they gave out to the press. Can't be bothered with a lot of damage suits floating around until we're sure, you know. The boat's there, all right, only ten fathoms down, caught on the reef. They were not far from one of the Bahama group, an uninhabited island,

probably part of this same volcanic drift. The scout ship brought full data on the whole thing, and the company's going through with it."

Margot's attention was drawn to the look of suppressed emotion in René's white face. Crosby was famous for his tactlessness, and the girl was obviously suffering from this direct bringing back of her father's tragic death. Dysart spoke:

"Just when do they propose starting the salvaging of this boat? It is most interesting to me."

"Right away. Inside of a couple of weeks, to avoid the equinoctial storms down there. Can't do that sort of work with a hurricane bluffing you out of your location every day or so. They sent down a diver to look the wreck over, I believe, and he reports favorably on it. There were no boiler explosions. The boat simply went on the reef and was ripped up. You don't recall hearing any explosion, do you, René, my dear, when you made your get-away?"

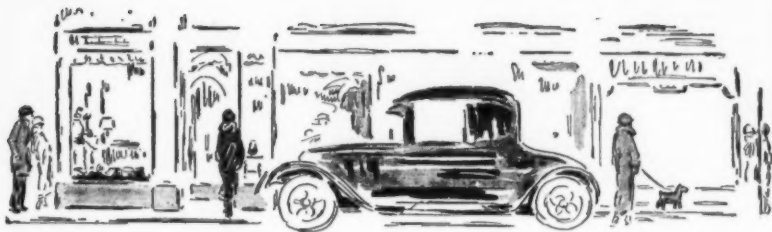
The eyes of all the guests were suddenly focused upon her. She tried to answer calmly, but the muscles of her throat seemed to have contracted, and she gave Stuart a look of appeal. He leaned forward, his voice controlled and natural.

"There were no explosions, Mr. Kelmscott. I can vouch for that." It gave him a strange sense of triumph to know that Conningsby heard him, and Margot herself. "I was in the lifeboat with Miss Jordan."

TO BE CONCLUDED.



IN ancient Rome married men had a right to the best seats at the public games. It is still all right to emulate the proverbial Romans in their own city, but such a rule would hardly gain favor elsewhere.



The 'Nineties and Now

By Stanley Olmsted

Author of "Irish Nemesis," "The Husband of Hilda Twardowski," etc.

A MENTAL portrait of the actress Eva Pragman Loudon was inefaceable with Edgworth Binfield, critic, essayist, whilom lecturer, who needs less introduction, let it be hoped, than men of lesser distinction. The lady stood forth, somehow, vivid, exigent as the pen-and-ink "Gibson girl" with whom she was contemporaneous. She held her own, long after roomy seasons of adolescence had been pushed aside by years full enough to have swept her with a thousand odds and ends into the dustbin.

Youth is voracious when it fixes a reaction. He had been a high school senior at the time the dazzling Miss Loudon had passed, fleetingly, even flying—passed by and on. For him, as for many another of that day, the stage held a glamour of something so remote as to seem half a legend. Its personalities were as figures in a tower, pluvius but out of human reach. Numerical overflow and press agenting had not yet profaned the mystery which hedged them.

Never before, as far as he was aware, had young Binfield looked upon any actress at all save across footlights, translating her into a species eluding tangibility. A good mother and several aunts had assured him that, in broad daylight

and in their own proper persons, these creatures were quite hideous to see, their deluding beauty being compounded of fatty pigments, even of plastic tallowes wherewith they altered themselves into such stuff as dreams are made of, in the artificial aura of their scene. With warning omniscience he had been admonished that whatsoever one beheld on the stage was always sham.

A lad of eighteen, expecting to enter Harvard in the fall, he had hitherto accepted the tenet. It was dogma, axiomatic since earliest childhood. He had swallowed it, ingenuously, as two decades later a war-gazing nation would swallow divers and sundry, as laddled by its propagandists. Yet the pound of prevention had failed for the milligram of cure. More eager at eighteen was he for glimpses of the falsity behind the fairness than he had been at eight, at which age, flanked by an aunt on either side, he had seen his first play, the "Black Crook" fairy pantomime.

And, lo, he had found himself one afternoon in actual tête-à-tête with one of these beings, un conjecturable, half fabulous. He had met in person an actress; more, well-nigh a star. And, even at close range and in the crass sunlight streaming through Mrs. Ashley's drawing-room curtains, she was incon-

testably glorious to look upon. His inexperience had to disgorge yet another pious, home-brewed error.

The occasion had been one of Mrs. Ashley's Thursdays-at-home.

If Eva Pragman Loudon had caught public notice through the New York run of "Disillusion," in which now she was touring, Mrs. Miriam Ashley could boast a fame riper than that. In a city which housed a governor and a State assembly, she held her own as a personage, and uniquely. Her "Little Jack Horner" had redoubled its sales record, following the vogue of the pretty little play into which she had turned it. And that was but an apex of the moment. "Rose and her Roses," "Beatific Betty," "The Administrator"—who fails to recall them? They may be bought to-day, their trickling reissues perennially stimulated by Miriam Ashley's annual or biannual novel. The literature she still enriches fails to live them down.

Yet that tête-à-tête of a lovely actress with a high-school boy, in the parlor of a noted authoress, had overtones of catastrophe of which young Binfield was naively unaware. He was to get it only gradually, as sophistication ripened with the years.

Miss Loudon's height was of the variety described as "queenly" in contemporary defiance of realism, with Victoria celebrating a diamond jubilee. Beneath her plumed picture hat her hair hung heavy, low, and flaxen in the fashion known as the Langtry coil. Her face of tinted egg shape, slightly gathering fullness toward the throat, was wreathed in smiles that partook of universality or immortality. Two babyish dimples, supplementing the smile, seemed, somehow, permanent. There was an unremitting gleam of white teeth between parted lips.

She made her entrance with the effectiveness to be expected. An utter stranger to every one present save Den-

nis O'Hara, her escort, she had by him been ushered straight to Mrs. Ashley, presiding for the moment at her own chocolate pot, behind a table in a corner. It was a part of Miss Loudon's triumph—destined a little later to such fatality—that, with nobody on hand to identify her, she yet imparted the certainty she had arrived.

Nor was that identity long to remain a mystery. Her mere coming in had solved the first forensic problem, the initial attention of an audience. It had halted Mrs. Ashley's customary stream of discourse to her callers; halted Mrs. Ashley's analysis of her own books, her own plays, her moods, predilections, aversions, romanticities and working methods—a type of monologue usual to her Thursday afternoons, limited in duration only by the receiving time, from three to six, and not inevitably by that. Its interruption, save for briefest instants as lady worshipers came or went, was exceptional, perhaps unprecedented. Miss Loudon was not one to permit the miraculous moment of such pausing to diffuse itself. For the nonce the down-stage center was hers. In the technical language of her craft, she "hogged" it.

She had chosen a vast chair, Gothic, baronial, directly facing Mrs. Ashley across the lace doilies and the macaroons.

"This Mrs. Westlake, she began, "this terrible Cynthia Westlake—I love her—I adore her—but she does take it out of me."

Expressive of how Cynthia Westlake took it out of her, Miss Loudon sipped at her chocolate. Her size matched her height with a certain emphasis of bust and hips then very fashionable, yet easily, perhaps too easily, imaginable as merging from its present phase of the statuesque into the Amazonian. The early spring day had been sultry. Between yellow brocade curtains, gently fluttering, fell a sun shaft of April, shooting just behind range of the ever-

so-slight fullness where the throat began, burnishing to molten gilt the low coil of hair. One black plume of the picture hat threw exactly the right shading about the turn of the cheek, making it slender, even spirituelle. No prearrangement with a limelight man could have done anything better.

"*Cynthia Westlake*?" Mrs. Ashley's bewilderment showed a touch of hauteur. Ordinarily her amities in her own person exceeded even the tenderness and light exuding from every story she had ever written. Plainly by the problematic *Cynthia* she was floored.

Moreover, the same sun shaft which served Miss Loudon with fortuitous docility, fell, as if with deliberate malignance, full on the high-colored face of the hostess. Mrs. Ashley's build was stocky, her hair flaming auburn. The sofa on which she sat behind the chocolate pot was low. In her Worth creation of pink satin, garnet velvet, and brown swansdown, she might have been some regal gnome playing interlocutor to an Olympian goddess. An elaboration of fiery puffs, suggesting untold patience and a hairdresser, imparted to her present pose an aspect elusively hydrocephalic.

"*Cynthia Westlake*?" she interrogated anew.

"With all her faults I love her," reiterated Miss Loudon. "I *adore* her! Poor *Cynthia*—more sinned against than sinning."

One of the youngest of the younger ladies present made a wild dive at *Cynthia*.

"I think—I'm quite sure I've been reading of her in the papers," this young lady hazarded. "I seem to remember a lovely picture of her in the Sunday *Journal* supplement. Did she win her breach-of-promise suit?"

A peal of silvery laughter from Miss Loudon relieved the general strain. Not unkindly laughter, nor derisive. A laughter that was rather of calculated

charm, falling like spray from thin, white heights to purple depths.

"You dear child," she corrected, "I don't mean any real person. I'm referring to this rôle I'm playing now—the heroine of this play we're doing this week at your new Grand Opera House—'Disillusion'!"

It was bewitchingly done. Moreover, it was Miss Loudon's real cue, the signal moment defining her as the spotlighted person they had all felt she must be, yet failed to guess she might be.

As spectators of a real professional actress in close and privileged revelation they might now be said to be "off."

For perhaps fifteen minutes thereafter, Eva Pragman Loudon, featured leading woman in the English adaptation of the French drama "*Disillusion*," held the stage. If the time was to suffer untimely curtailment, hers was a craft in which the duration of the scene counts for less than its intensity. In her bobbed quarter of an hour Miss Loudon managed to sketch in an autobiography of enchanting conjecture; to digress airily into side lines of *Cynthia*, created by herself for America; to touch upon the play and its young author, one Guérin Larrabé who was casting Sardou into the shade; to amplify its plot and problem, its unjustly alleged immorality, its fresher, franker vigor in the original French, the heart-breaking deletions exacted in a Puritan country.

"But what else can you expect!" deplored Miss Loudon, with outflung gesture of despair. "A people fed on the provender of the Homely Ladies' Monthlies!" By unfortunate accident, a serial by Miriam Ashley was just then attracting universal admiration in a very worthy magazine of the type alluded to.

"I'm afraid," ventured Dennis O'Hara, "I'm afraid—your *Cynthia Westlake* was, after all, a bit of a naughty girl."

It could not be called an interruption. Launched in a winged instant of Miss Loudon's breath-taking, it seemed more in the nature of an uneasy bid for mercy. Debonair and sociable, O'Hara, gubernatorial clerk, about to embark on the practice of law, was understood to be a chosen favorite in the innermost circle of the famed mid-western authoress. Slim, smart, impeccable in his poverty, he was welcome in scores of drawing-rooms in a city cryptically legended for its dearth of men. Cocky assurance garbed him, as a rule, with the trigness of his cutaway and patent leathers. For some reason this assurance had left him. He hovered in the offing, restive as a man conscious of a hole in his sock. At Mrs. Ashley he shied unconscious glances that implored.

Miss Loudon had bridled prettily at *Cynthia's* naughtiness.

"You are horrid, Dennis O'Hara. Isn't he, Mrs. Ashley? Moreover, you don't *get Cynthia*, Dennis." The "Dennis" was not lost on the lady behind the macaroons.

"Poor *Cynthia*," sighed Miss Loudon, "Every one misunderstands her—in the play, no less than in the audience."

Poor *Cynthia* was none the less, it appeared, a distinct triumph of a person, as embodied by Miss Loudon. She justified the foresight and daring of the manager who had selected Miss Loudon to portray her.

"Why, I was the merest novice," Miss Loudon told them. "Just an amateur, you might say. Until two or three seasons ago I had never faced the footlights. All my relations, the Pragmans no less than the Loudons, were inviolately opposed. Rigid Bostonians, you know—direct descendants from the *Mayflower*—with the family fortunes sadly shrunken."

Long afterward young Binfield seemed to recall a steady stiffening of the hostess' puff-crowned face. The memory was purest hazard. Assuredly he

made no note of it at the time. Lanky, long-leggy, overgrown, submerged in a feminine assemblage that ignored him automatically week after week, he had nor eyes nor ears save for the beautiful actress, whose lustrous glance roved often in his direction, whose comprehensive smile did not delete him. Perhaps in him she sensed the pulse of a very essential appreciativeness. If so, that, too, was but a theory for days he was yet to live. Spellbound he watched and listened.

As for Dennis O'Hara, the sole other male person in the room, he ventured nothing further. He clung to the background like one who has found a twin button missing from his cutaway.

"And here was I," Miss Loudon was continuing, "a big, grown-up girl, already through college, who ought to be doing something. There was never a Pragman or a Loudon since Plymouth Rock who wasn't literary. So I launched into journalism. When an inexperienced girl goes up against that game—"

It was Miss Loudon's misfortune that at this point, exactly, in her story of recent stage beginnings, the shaft of sunlight, whereby she had pictorially benefited, should alter its tactics suddenly and cruelly. It had crept to her chin, outlining the same as something that would not, for any limitless time, escape being double. It even searched the tinted features as if bent on demonstrating obvious massage. The very plume that had, until that instant, so happily shaded her cheek, took on a baffling maturity.

"Ah," she went on, "Mrs. Ashley will be able, no doubt, to tell you about all that—the bayonets pointed at the beginner in writing. It is all long, long past now, but she will know."

Faintly, deep in the crater, a super-sensitive ear might have felt the rumble of lava. Mrs. Ashley's pale eyes had gone steely beneath their sandy lashes.

Miss Loudon's smile ranged young

Binfield and the room, her babyish dimples keeping, somehow, steadfast.

"Well, to make a long story short, my schoolgirlish stab at journalism just about sacked me. A little Pragman-Loudon inheritance was all but gone in the hole. I realized I must be turning to something else to *live*——"

Whereupon followed Miss Loudon's account of the first call upon a theatrical manager—a call innocent of design other than to get a story. Something the manager said had caused her to laugh. He had turned upon her in a way that had made her jump. "What will you take for that laugh?" he had growled—Miss Loudon imitated the basso profundo of the growling—and she had been terribly frightened until he had explained with further scowling—also imitated—"I need it in a play I'm casting."

Timidity had not, it seemed, robbed the inexperienced journalist of her wits.

"That laugh will be expensive," she had replied. "My relations would never forgive my going on the stage. That laugh comes high, if you must have it!"

Here the humor of the reminiscence interrupted its narration. The laugh that was to be expensive peeled forth again, in replica of its first pealing fifteen minutes earlier, though with even added luster.

One high-pitched silvery note, descending to bubbling richness.

And herein lay her catastrophe. Such laughter must round itself in its musical dying fall. It was on the solo note of its silencing that Mrs. Ashley grasped her opportunity. To do so, with no remission of good form, required agility. Mrs. Ashley was equal to it. She grasped, without appearing to jump.

"Kathinka dear," she said softly, addressing the young woman who had recalled an erroneous *Cynthia* from a Sunday supplement, "won't you relieve me at this chocolate pouring for a while? That's a love. I've sat here until I have grown to the shape of this sofa."

No literalness was intended, though the metaphor took on a sort of realism as the creator of "Little Jack Horner" bent, extricating her sound-built little frame from the narrow space behind the table.

"Miss Loudon," she said, emerging full stature at last, her garnet-velvet train sweeping behind her, "do let me present you to Mr. Edgworth Binfield. He, too, is an experimental journalist. He and my son Reginald are coeditors of a bimonthly magazine published in their high school. I do assure you, Master Reginald regards him as a very great man. By the way, Dennis"—turning sharply to O'Hara—"haven't you promised to show Master Reginald about the new State building? He was speaking of it this morning. For Saturday, isn't it? I live six months of every year in the shadow of the mansion, but my ignorance of our civic progress is an abyss. Will you pilot me, too, around, or are you growing so dignified, so distinguished——"

But it was the gubernatorial clerk himself who was here and now piloted, the objective point being the remotest corner of the rear drawing-room, where the plan of sight-seeing could be more privately projected.

Well apart, on outer fringes, young Binfield found himself standing with the beautiful lady who was really an actress. So prompt had been the segregation of the other ladies present about Miss Kathinka, it might have been a pre-arranged signal. Eva Pragman Loudon was for the moment his exclusive own. It was beyond belief. They were like two persons marooned. It was quite too wonderful.

"So you're a real live editor!" Miss Loudon's eyes followed her hostess and O'Hara to their retreat. "I ought to be very frightened!"

"Aw!"—deprecatingly. Young Edgworth was praying for the scintillant

reply to twirl on his paralyzed tongue. "I—er—it's nothing so much to brag about."

"And this Master Reginald—the son, of whom Mrs. Ashley is telling us——"

"Oh—er—I guess that's why I get invited here. He's our first-year editor."

Two hands that felt fearfully in evidence were thrust into two pockets of trousers that young Binfield realized needed pressing. Blushing second thoughts rejected the elegant nonchalance of the gesture. The hands were accordingly withdrawn. They clutched now at two coat lapels.

"We made him first-year editor," he went on. "You see, he could bring us a lot of publicity and—er—all that, being as he was the original of the hero in 'Little Jack Horner'—as it were."

"Didn't I hear something about that"—the luster of the Loudon gaze roved again to O'Hara, afar—"when the book first appeared, long before the play? It must have been many years ago."

"I wouldn't be surprised if you did. There was quite a lot about it in the papers—quite a bunch of pictures and things. Mrs. Ashley wrote a piece for the *Mother's Magnet* about his being the real Little Jack Horner in her book. That's his picture on the wall, here—the way he's supposed to've looked then."

The life-size portrait had hung behind Miss Loudon while she was seated. It was a full length depicting Master Reginald at the age of six. The artist's loyal attempt to suggest Rembrandt and a Stuart of England had been impeded somewhat, by a striking, if infantile, resemblance to the mother.

"But I would never have thought," said Miss Loudon, "that Mrs. Ashley had a son so young!"

"Oh, he's a lot older now—and some fatter. He's fifteen now. He got promoted to the high school last fall. The boys in his year call him 'Freckles,'" Binfield explained.

"And is there," inquired Miss Loudon, "is there any portrait of *Mister* Miriam Ashley?"

"Do you mean Mrs. Ashley's husband? Nobody ever sees much of him. I guess he's a—er—a kind of a recluse—as it were."

Guiltless this time was young Binfield of any desire to scintillate. Seriousness cloaked him like a mantle. Yet for the third time within the hour Miss Loudon bestowed the expensive laugh; fairly poured it out, with prodigal extravagance. Young Binfield underwent the agony of being sure he must have said something he shouldn't.

"We don't run a theatrical section," he hastened to atone, "but I'm going right to-morrow night to see your play and—er—I'm going to write a piece about it for our editorials—if you don't mind. It'll be so much more interesting—me actually acquainted with you like this!"

"Be sure you send me a copy. I shall be awfully frightened at what you may say. You editors are terrible fellows. Remember, I speak from experience——"

Her voice was trailing absently. Beyond the averted shoulders of Mrs. Ashley her eyes had, at last, caught their mark in the eyes of Dennis O'Hara. The immediate result was but the dropping of his glance in seeming redoubled attentiveness to the authoress. Her voice was a murmur plangent and steady. Over the front drawing-room had fallen one of those silences that now and then smite, as with wands, a socially assembled group—"angels passing," the legend has it.

Binfield stirred uneasily.

"Won't Miss Loudon and Mr. Binfield let me pour them another cup of chocolate?" Miss Kathinka's hospitable offer pierced the stillness with shrill tinkle, like an icicle shattering.

"No, no, thank you!" Miss Loudon raised slightly a voice that lacked no

distinctness, even at its lowest. "I'm afraid we—at least I—must be going."

In his remote retreat Dennis O'Hara shifted a sitting posture betraying subtle tortures. Unabated, the plangent murmur at his side rose and fell.

"You see—I have to dine a full hour before going to the theater. I do hate to be rushing Mr. O'Hara away. If some one will just ask him to call me a hansom——"

Young Binfield hunched his shoulders. The gods were indeed kind to him. It seemed an open bid.

"If—if you care to let me take you home, Miss Loudon——"

But Dennis O'Hara had somehow managed to bring his crisis to an issue. One heard him announce to Mrs. Ashley, and doggedly:

"Miss Loudon dines early. I'm afraid we must be going."

But he came meekly enough toward the front drawing-room, in the trail of the garnet train. His face was pale but passive. Mrs. Ashley was welcomed by her ladies as effusively as had she been on a journey. Even in their preoccupation they had not missed the survey of the portrait, and they stormed her with inquiries about Reggie.

"That adorable child!" they chorused. Why had they seen nothing of him this afternoon?

"Master Reginald is out somewhere with his father," said Mrs. Ashley.

Miss Loudon stood poised for departure; a winged victory, trapped by defeat yet not quite headless.

"So happy to have met you all," she smiled. "And you, too, Mr. Binfield. Be sure you send me your editorial. I do hate to tear Mr. O'Hara away. I was just saying—if he would only call me a hansom——"

"The one we came in," said Dennis O'Hara, "is still outside, waiting for us."

"You terribly extravagant man!" chided Miss Loudon.

It was masterly. In four words it conveyed all she would have Mrs. Ashley know. It conveyed: "You see, you know all about your Dennis O'Hara. You're not his only confidant. I know he's an underpaid clerk who has pinched to get his law degree and plays around for social prestige, maybe even for the money to hang out his shingle."

But what Miss Loudon said aloud was:

"How I would love to have seen your little son! I've been hearing about him so many years."

"That's his portrait—there behind you," said Mrs. Ashley.

"We've—we've just been looking at it," stammered young Binfield, blushing scarlet.

"Indeed we have! It's simply charming!"

Gracefully, with all the technique of her calling, Miss Loudon was backing and bowing herself out.

"A really lovely portrait! As I was saying to Mr. Binfield, I had never dreamed Mrs. Ashley had a son so young."

Mrs. Miriam Ashley managed to say her gracious adieus without stressing her failure to suggest any repetition of the call.

Of such was the souvenir persistent with Edgworth Binfield, critic, essayist, whilom lecturer.

It closed abruptly as it had begun. On Eva Pragman Loudon as a human entity, bereft of her footlights, the curtain descended with her exit from Mrs. Ashley's parlor in the company of Dennis O'Hara. To be sure, it arose and fell on Friday and Saturday matinée performances of "Disillusion," both of which the high-school lad loyally attended. To do so, indeed, he begged himself of very limited week-end pocket money. He kept, too, his promise to write a piece about the daring though purified French play for his editorials

in the bimonthly *Sapientia*. The composition, alas, was barred out by the teachers' censorship committee as a subject unsuited to high-school journalism. He had dreamed of a glowing correspondence, perhaps even of lasting friendship, with this printed eulogy as its foundation. He consoled himself, or tried to, with the possibility that she might forget about it.

Nor was he ever able to recall the most casual comment, whether from Mrs. Ashley or her friends, after Miss Loudon had bowed herself out and away. If any word, admiring or derogatory, was uttered about her by any one of them, it was not in his hearing. Their silence was almost like a concerted understanding. The high school lad was long puzzled by such blank ignoring of so rich a subject.

As it happened, too, that Thursday turned out to be Mrs. Ashley's last of the season. Her flights to Rome, or Paris, or the Riviera, were always sudden. Nobody was overly surprised when papers of the following week carried announcements of her annual departure.

As usual, Master Reggie remained in the custody of a father so rarely seen by any of Mrs. Ashley's friends that his very existence often seemed a myth.

Then the holidays, beginning in June, took young Binfield himself away, and Harvard, where honors were to find him, claimed him in the autumn. He made an editorship of the *Crimson*. He made Phi Beta Kappa. During vacations, and following graduation, he tutored and traveled. His thriving home city, which had doubled its population between two censuses, knew him no more.

On a certain day in a more recent year of grace—if any year since the great holocaust may be called that—two pedestrians paused before a frameful of photographs in the lobby of a New York theater.

The photographs were mounted, fan-wise and horizontally, on a gray cardboard ground. The frame which held them had been set on an easel, just inside the arch which made of the playhouse entrance a sort of arcade extension of the sidewalk. Other and similar framefuls were in evidence, tilted against the walls from the floor to right and left.

The easel dominated the central zone, however. It invited attention like a sun amid a plethora of skylights.

The two passers-by, whose casual curiosity had been attracted, were strangers to each other. They had approached the easel from opposite directions. In mutual unconsciousness, in utter absorption, they stared at the portrait pattern; read and reread, and read again, the neat lettering with which it was variegated.

The Distinguished American Actress

EVA PRAGMAN LOUDON

In a tabloid of the famous dramatic classic
"Disillusion"

By Guerin Larrabé, immortal contemporary
and rival of the great

SARDOU

The hour was mid-forenoon of a January Sunday. Seventh Avenue stretched abaft, the core of a giant induction coil, gone dead. Further to sternward loomed the *Times* tower, lofty, quiescent, immobile as Gizeh, symbolizing the hiatus. Along the surface-car tracks little spurts of damp gustiness toyed with fragments of newspaper. Sabbath-morn somnolence lay over the city. Predominantly it slumbered in its haze of oncoming noontide.

It may have been boredom, or Simon-pure loneliness, that had moved two men, of the type of these, to study a vaudeville announcement as were it an inscription of Cheops. At any rate, there was a barely audible sigh as one of them turned away, with a shake of

his top-hatted head; and the other became conscious of his presence. Sociability is latent with most of us, even after passé years have trained to aloofness. In both head shake and sigh had been something unmistakably personal.

"She is well preserved."

"Oh, quite. Remarkably." The top-hatted gentleman gazed up and down the raffle-swept car line. "I have not lived in this country for many years. I did not even realize she was still alive."

"Well, she's very much alive, I assure you. She was a beautiful woman in the 'nineties."

"Allowing for a slight obesity, she seems still to be, in a ripe and evolved sort of way."

"She is, you know, miraculous as it sounds! Of course, the retoucher's done something, here. And one or two of these poses weren't made yesterday. I recognize that middle picture, for instance, as the one used for a three-sheet poster when she revived 'Disillusion,' following her marriage in nineteen-five, and made a farewell tour. It was a wealthy marriage. To a stockbroker, I believe."

"You seem quite to have mastered her chronology." The top-hatted gentleman was moved to turn from far horizons on which, some time during the course of the morning, might appear a surface car. Frankly he scrutinized the socially inclined person who had addressed him. His first deduction was as to age. Somewhere well along in the fifties, he decided. He himself would turn midstream of the roaring forties in a year or two; and he was aware that the close-clipped Vandyke on his own thin, ascetic face must even out much of the difference.

Tentatively his hand went out.

"If I'm not mistaken, we've met before, sir. Your name, unless I err, is O'Hara—Dennis O'Hara. If I happen to be wrong——"

"Surest thing you know!" interrupted the other, and, though the slang was not of nineteenth century vintage, the manner of its saying reconstructed him. Dennis O'Hara's face might be lined; smooth-shaven, as well, of the once dashing mustachios. The thick, once-chestnut hair might be its present even-ashen gray. But in some trick of the manner, the petted if impecunious favorite of social leaders in a growing mid-western city emerged as were his corpulence but insubstantial mist. He stood, recreated as of yore. He might even be hazarded as still at his specialty.

"You've got the advantage of me, though," O'Hara added. "If you'd just tell me your name—since you remember mine——"

"Even that will help but little, I'm afraid. I was a mere lad. It's doubtful if you realized I was around. My name is Binfield—Edgworth Binfield. I used to meet you at the Thursdays of a Mrs. Miriam Ashley. The last one I recall was when you brought this lady." Binfield tapped the easel with his cane.

O'Hara was cogitating. Light broke suddenly through the fogs.

"By Jove!" he said and seized Binfield's still-extended hand with paternal fervor. "By Jove!"

"Is it as bad as all that?"

"What a small world it is!" continued O'Hara, still wringing one long-lost hand with two. "My boy, how you have grown!"

"I was a six-footer already in those days," demurred Binfield. "And I haven't taken on much bulk."

"Oh, I don't mean size. If anything, you're thinner. I'm talking about the way you've become a celebrity. That series in the London *Times*—'War Time Psychologies of the Theater' and—and all that sort of thing. Collected into your book, they've been having a live sale over here—among the choice few. I'll admit I might not have heard

of them myself—I'm a lowbrow, you know. But Eva loaned me the book—the dear old sport—and then Mrs. Ashley loaned me another copy——”

“You've kept track of her, too?”

“Hasn't everybody? Even in our day she was kind of—a local shrine, as it were. But now she's a national institution.”

“I knew *she* was still alive,” said Binfield, the seeming inference being that he couldn't imagine her dead.

“Well, there were a good many years when she didn't return the compliment,” confessed O'Hara. “None of us did. So few people were, you know. The war—the influenza—all that sort of thing—and you dropped away so mysteriously right at the sprouting age. But she found your book lying on a table at Brentano's. She half identified you from the frontispiece—her memory was longer than those classy whiskers you're wearing. She questioned and made sure. *She bought your book!*”

“Marvelous enough. But didn't Miss Loudon, too—or did I understand you?”

“I'll tell the world she did. Trust dear old Eva. Reggie Ashley had told her all about it.”

“It all sounds,” observed Binfield, “as if you'd all grown into a happy family.”

“Because Eva knows Reggie? Good heavens, no! That friendship's strictly ex-officio—developed since Eva's last divorce when she went to France for war work. Reggie was a Y. M. C. A. secretary over there. He's now around forty—if we count back. But he looks much the same, except for being bald. Freckles gone, of course, and maybe a little redder in lieu of them. He was always chunky, you'll recall.”

“But why the: ‘Good heavens, no?’”

“Heavens, old man!”—O'Hara lowered his voice, though in the empty spaces of the Sabbath city he might safely have shouted—“the mere mention of poor Eva's name in mamma's hearing is like dropping an egg shell

full of nitroglycerine. So don't, if you chance to resume the acquaintance. Reggie never does. He's a very devoted son. Faithful to early training. He still calls her ‘Carissima.’”

“The nest egg of her books must be sizable by now,” mused Binfield, apropos of nothing. “She drops one or two a year. Everybody seems to read them—except myself.”

“I'll say so! You ought to see her estate, Ashlington over on the Sound—name arranged from her own. She's been a shrewd speculator, too. Her adored Reggie's the sole and only heir. Poor Mr. Ashley passed on years ago—before son Reggie had finished at Princeton, in fact. He was always a little vague, you may remember—Mr. Ashley, I mean.”

“I seem to make out,” announced Binfield, “a dark speck on the distant sky line. Its approach is too gradual for anything save a rough zodiacal surmise. But it *may* be my surface car.”

“What's brought you out, anyhow,” questioned O'Hara, “at such an unearthly hour? Of course you'll say ‘you too!’ But I'm catching a Long Island train. I'm summoned to breakfast at Ashlington.”

“I'm on my way up to the Park,” explained Binfield, “to walk off some of my surplus weight and visit the zoo. I used never to miss going—as a boy. There was a wonderful red lioness——”

“Ten to one you'll find her right in the same old cage.”

“Oh, quite,” agreed Binfield. “There seems to be quite a bit of immortality, you know, going on in your New York.”

The approach of Binfield's street-car was, however, laconic enough to extend the amenities, and two days later the two men lunched together at the Waldorf.

O'Hara had breakfasted Sunday at Mrs. Ashley's home on the Sound. He

overflowed with news. To begin with, Mrs. Ashley had succeeded at last, she believed, in breaking the friendship between her Reggie and the dangerous Miss Loudon.

"I don't know how she's done it, I'm sure," he went on. "The two ladies have never been in contact. There's been exactly one meeting between them since that fateful one when I took the rising actress to call on the arisen authoress, twenty-five years ago."

"You meant well."

O'Hara sighed.

"That single meeting," he proceeded, "was only a year or two ago—in Paris—when the two ladies found themselves in charge of adjoining booths at some war bazaar. I don't suppose Mrs. Miriam Ashley could help it. Eva has a way of taking old friends by storm, even when they're old foes—literally falls on their necks. Reggie was present and presented. It's a good guess the second encounter finished the good work begun at the first."

Binfield meditated.

"I would have thought," he said musingly, "that the favor in which you then were held by both ought to have married you off to one or the other by now."

"A lot of people thought so, too—about Mrs. Miriam, at least." O'Hara's shrug was pensive. "Even I wasn't convinced she wouldn't ever. Particularly when she started the divorce proceedings. As luck would have it, though, he ups and dies on her, shortly after she files the preliminaries. She happened to be abroad at the time. The poor fellow's passing on—so kind of lonesome with even the only son away—touched some chord in her or something. She was always kind of sentimental, you know. She went into deepest mourning—began to grieve for him—took to canonizing him. I never had a ghost of a show after the husband died."

"Dear me!" Binfield was all sympathy.

"I'm always just missing things like that. It's my life story. What am I to-day? When you knew me I was a promising young lawyer—at least I promised to be—and now I hold down a hired desk in a room with five others at No. 5 Nassau! It was the same during the war. I was a dollar-a-year man in Washington and just missed becoming one of the country's twenty thousand millionaires—missed it by a hair," he said with conviction.

"Hard luck, Dennis."

"But she sticks to her old friends—Mrs. Miriam does. She was delighted about my running into you. Wants me to bring you over. She's having an at home this week—the biggest ever celebrated, even by her. It's supposed to be occasioned by the anniversary of the first appearance of 'Little Jack Horner.' She doesn't say *which* anniversary—we couldn't expect that of her. Strictly *entre nous*, I've a theory that it's to celebrate the shattering of the ominous spell cast by Miss Loudon over her son. I've yet to learn how it was done, as I've said already, but Mother Ashley's sure she did it. She's contrived, it appears, to spring an irrevocable breach between the pair. That may have something to do with Eva's sudden reëmergence into vaudeville. She always was a practical girl, inclined to take any altered prospects by the forelock. You'll go with me to Mother Ashley's party, of course?"

"What day did you say?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Thursday!" Over Binfield, the philosopher, there flowed a bland and blissful calm. Thursday. Of course.

Life was, somehow, immutable even amid its mutations.

"But," he began again, breaking the mutual contemplativeness that had fallen over their Waldorf window table, "you've explained why it wasn't the distinguished and wealthy Miriam Ashley. You haven't yet told me how it hap-

pened not to be the lovely and clever Miss Loudon."

"Beg your pardon?" The slight sagging under O'Hara's once-so-compelling, black-rimmed gray eyes had grown more pronounced.

"Don't look so dazed. You're still a bachelor like me. I keep curious about that. When I grew old enough to review that other Thursday in proper perspective I perceived fair grounds for Mrs. Ashley's misgivings. 'Disillusion' was an alluring play. And *Cynthia Westlake*—"

"She's been reviving her ever since," absently broke in the other. "This tabloid version may be her last stand—and again it may not!"

"We digress. How did you manage to escape this young and gorgeous woman?"

"She wasn't so blamed young, at that. There happened, too, to be a perfectly good husband already—possibly not in active service at the time. No, I don't mean the stockbroker I mentioned as financing the farewell tour in 1905. I refer to a predecessor."

"I give it up!" sighed Binfield. "For an amateur like myself, her chronology's quite too complicated."

And across the white Waldorf carnations in their crystal chalice he regarded the brooding O'Hara—handsome, woman-winning O'Hara, who always just missed everything.

On the appointed Thursday Binfield chartered a limousine and drove with O'Hara to Ashlington. They had agreed to get there early and make an afternoon and evening of it, but an accident delayed them.

Dusk thickened in a tang of salty mists ere they passed betwixt the wrought-iron gates of Ashlington. Striped awnings and globes milky yellow, stretched and picked on either side the driveway, gave the premises an aspect festively medieval, as of some

preparation for a tournament. It was still light enough for Binfield to make out Mrs. Ashley's broad lawns, extending in graded terraces to the chill, lipping waters of the Sound.

They were late. But to the tardy guest belongs the spectacle. Even in the entrance hall, big as an arena, its ducal staircase backed by stained-glass arches, guests, predominantly ladies, swirled and eddied. The smell of flowers, of punch, of perfumes with musk as their basic ingredient, blended into the chromatic scheme of shaded lights. Black-frocked, white-capped maids, of indeterminable functions, seemed everywhere, together with a plethora of uniformed lackeys.

Unladen of coats, mufflers, and arctics in an antechamber, O'Hara and Binfield pushed and elbowed their way toward a vast room that seemed to have been added as a sort of casino to the general architectural scheme. Without use of a field glass, they had discovered a canopied dais, far at its remoter end. They surmised, not incorrectly, that their hostess would be found there.

"We'll breathe again when we get over to it," whispered O'Hara.

"To be sure," Binfield panted back. "As far as one can make out, it's the one vacant area in all the house."

She recognized them emerging from the mêlée into the open. She arose from her throne chair on the dais. Its fretwork of gilded Gothic reached halfway to the top of the silken canopy, but the seat had been nicely adjusted so that her feet could touch the floor. Binfield felt actual excitement. He had a blurred impression of an indomitable little woman, with hair redder than any hair he could remember—veritable scarlet orange—standing with hands outstretched, in a pink-satin robe, with garnet-velvet train.

It was not, as for one tingling moment he imagined, the identical robe of those receptions in the 'nineties. Certain details of its fashioning instantly would

have told a more discerning eye that it was new. The train, for one thing, was not shirred to a pointed basque, slightly below the waistline. There was no waistline at all. The train floated, voluminous, imperial, from bejeweled shoulder straps.

She was ahead of O'Hara, beginning to announce:

"Mrs. Miriam, I have brought you this evening——"

"Edgworth Binfield!" she cried. "Can it really be little Edgworth—the boy hero of my boy?" And she leaned from her dais, giving him both her hands and scanning his features. She held his eyes. There had never been anything evasive in the way Mrs. Ashley could search a face. Edgworth was moved.

"But what a small world it is," she said at last.

"So—so Dennis was saying, Sunday."

"And how you have grown!"

Binfield was about to say: "He said that, too," but managed to bite his tongue before saying it.

"Wretches! Why do you get here so late?" she accused. "I'd almost begun to give you up. Dennis, will you please pilot me down and off to some corner where we three can talk of old times like human beings? I've been sitting in that old oaken chair until I've grown to the shape of it."

The retirement to which she conducted them was chinzy and palm verdured, and enclosed in glass partitions. Through its hither end Mrs. Ashley could keep a weather eye on her party, ready for any emergencies that might confront her as a hostess. In a capacious wicker chair, flanked by Binfield on the one side and O'Hara on the other, she relaxed.

She had wished a chance to talk "like a human being," and she made rather more than that of this opportunity. Twenty-five talkable years had been added to those of the Thursdays in the city still assigned to her in "Who's

Who." Never had her monologing form been finer. Reggie emerged, in due course, among talking items countless as the sea sands.

"He's still the dearest boy in all the world," she told them. "A confirmed celibate, too. He finds no woman to supplant his mother."

"Where is Reggie, by the way?" O'Hara inquired.

"I was just wondering," echoed Binfield.

"Oh, he's on his way. He telephoned my secretary about some delay in the city. He's a workingman now, you know."

O'Hara's start was evidence that he didn't know—or hadn't.

"He's in business, if you please, and gives every moment to it. I've rented him a suite of offices in West Fortieth Street and its nearly impossible to pry him out of them—simply infatuated with his job, that boy, and hates the slightest interruption! Often he muzzles his telephone even from me. But I'm expecting him any moment now. Dear me, what's all this?"

The orange-crimson head had been thrust suddenly forward. Puzzled eyes, faded but much mascaraed, were peering out through the glass doors.

Some commotion was afoot. Maids and lackeys seemed stung to electric energies. In the dearth of anything to do, they had subsided to mere lounging on-lookers. Now they scurried in pleased agitation. They darted hither and yon.

With an excitement approaching the mob spirit, guests were moving, pushing, in some instances even running, toward the throne room recently quitted by Miriam Ashley. Already they were a packed mass about its doors.

"You'd think it was a fire," suggested O'Hara, "only they're not scared enough. They're gayer than ever. They're downright delirious!"

"Maybe it's the punch," said Binfield. But Mrs. Ashley was no longer atten-

tive. Profound if mystified annoyance had supplanted the voluble calm of her mood.

She arose and went, with quickening paces, her imperial velvet billowing with the effect of some regal little brig gulping the gale from a mizzenmast. They followed behind.

In the new casino wing was the maelstrom. About its far-away dais and canopy, eager ladies were heaving like particolored bees that have selected a branch for their swarming. Two white-capped maids had climbed to the elevation of a settee near the entrance and craned their necks in happy abandon. Mrs. Ashley jerked at the skirt of one of them, startling her into soberness.

"This is most unseemly. You and Lizzie forget yourselves. What is the matter?"

They both climbed humbly down.

"I think it's a actress, ma'am," said one.

"Mr. Reginald brought her, ma'am!"

"Where is Mr. Reginald?" Mrs. Ashley's uniformity of red was giving way to spottings of white.

"They're both in there, ma'am. That's why everybody's jammin' up the place so. We didn't mean to rubber—we didn't think——"

"Now, now, let's go back to the sun room," soothed O'Hara. "Let 'em look at their actress. Maybe the punch bowl's gone dry."

But Mrs. Ashley was not tarrying on the order of his consolations. There was something magnificent in her setness of direction, parting her revelers as with cleaving prow, to right and left. Awed and subdued, the two men hurried in her wake. They traversed the trail she blazed well-nigh to the very steps of the dais.

Under the canopy stood Reggie. He was obviously self-conscious, but bravely smiling. He perspired. In his frock coat, white boutonniere and general gala

grooming, he had made himself master of ceremonies. He was introducing the lady who sat in the high-backed Gothic chair to his right—sat extending her hands in appealing gesture before the scores of other hands stretched toward the two of them, like a hemirclet of shielding pickets. She wore a sheathlike gown, more expressing than revealing a Juno form, of problematic compressions. Her hair matched the gown, yielding little to it in the glint of its metallic luster. The whole combination, undeniably effective, was crowned by a black-plumed picture hat.

O'Hara was clutching Binfield's arm.

"Good God!" he whispered hoarsely. "It's Eva!"

As for Reggie, he worked faithfully if fast.

"So kind of you all—thank everybody so much! Mrs. Snyder, meet my wife. Miss de Sarata—ah, you're friends already, I see. I might have known. My wife, Mrs. Logomore. So kind of all of you to storm us with congratulations like this! Ah! Now you must all give way—here comes Carissima—my dear mother! This marriage is a little anniversary surprise, you know! She doesn't yet know that I'm bringing her a lovely daughter—to our lonesome home."

Yet the deepest impression made upon Binfield was, as usual, retrospective. It was first active with the presentation of the bill for the chartered limousine at his hotel next day.

"I went week-end broke in the 'nineties," he mused, "going to the 'Disillusion' Saturday matinée, after I'd gone already, Friday night."

Counting out the final of the tens, he mused again:

"This time one performance has done it. I wonder if this garage fellow can't give me a few addresses of inexpensive lodgings?"

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

MUCH has been written and said, especially since the war, anent the presence in everyday matters of the supernatural. Psychical research has concentrated upon the so-called evidence presented as unmistakable proof by the protagonists of spiritualism and other occult sciences in an effort to clear the matter up for all time and to the utter satisfaction of meticulous minds. The conclusions of the investigators seem, on the whole, to be still in abeyance. But the testimony of the disciples still lacks nothing of fervor and genuineness. It is our own opinion, however, that the world will continue to divide itself into those who interpret manifestations rationally and those who see in them only messages from a so-called "beyond."

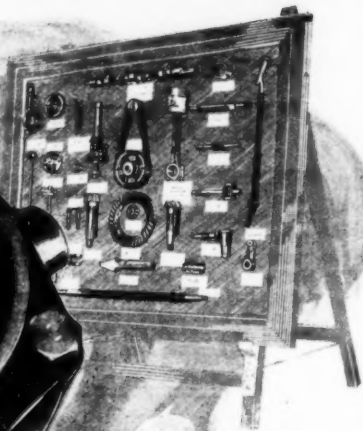
COMING into his rooms one day, Philip Mortimer was confronted with what seemed definitely to be a supernatural manifestation. Though his fastidious, logical mind shied at the possibility, still the proof of the strange happening was unmistakable. On the mantel across the room stood the costly ancient vase which a few days before he had acquired at an exclusive auction. Upon it was engraved a lovely dancing maiden. He had, deliberately, placed the vase so that the cavorting maid would look toward the sunlight which streamed through the window. And his æsthetic soul leaped at the beauty of her exquisite profile thus illumed. And now, coming suddenly into his library, he lifted his eyes to the lovely creature opposite and found— Strange as it may seem, he found that the lovely lady had turned about on the lustrous surface of the vase, and was as wistfully gazing in the other direction. Swiftly his mind attempted to work the thing out, explain it rationally. And relentlessly that well-trained mind told him that, turn an object at any angle, the decoration thereon would still remain in the same relation to that object. There was no denying the conviction that the gorgeous lady on the vase, with feminine whim, had turned about and definitely changed her viewpoint. Mortimer was bewildered, to put it conservatively. And his bafflement goaded him into thorough investigation. One of the most ingenious tales we have ever published, a tale, moreover, which is decidedly not of the "ghost story" variety, is Winston Bouvé's latest novelette, called "The Maid of Melos." Here is a story with a situation entirely new to fiction, one that will fine-comb

your emotions and gently harass your sleuth instincts. You will find it complete in the next, the December number.

THERE is probably no consideration which touches the mind and imagination of the average woman more closely and more poignantly than the consideration of her beauty and personal allure. There are those who deny, who even for a time completely vanquish, the concern for their comeliness. But for many women beauty and its natural accompaniment, love, are still the vital interests. Madame Sermany had built up what approximated an international institution devoted to the cultivation and maintenance of feminine beauty. She was ably abetted in her campaign for universal feminine loveliness by her bewitching young daughter, Vera, who was the more practical member of the firm. But there came to the older woman moments alone when she remembered longingly a period in the past, when she was less an internationally famous woman and more a happy young creature reaching out for all that life proffered. With characteristic deftness and insight into the hearts of humans, Mildred Cram has written one of the best stories of her career, "Beauty, Incorporated," for the December AINSLEE'S.

DURING a sojourn abroad the daughter of an aristocratic American family informed her parents that she had married General Wing Lee of China. Consternation was rife in the conservative household. And speculation was indulged in by all as to the proper attitude to assume toward the young bride and her quite ineligible husband. Not wholly unexpectedly a murder occurred several days after the arrival of the young couple. But the outcome of the tedious situation was quite different from what one would even remotely suspect. Her latest ingenious short story marks Beatrice Ravenel again as one of the most resourceful writers. Read her absorbing tale, "General Wing Lee of China," in the coming AINSLEE'S. In the same number appear also stories by other favorite authors. Berthe K. Mellett's story, "The Loser," is, as usual with this author's work, forceful and diverting. Frances O. J. Gaither has contributed to the issue a story more than usually gripping, with a charmingly wistful quality at the same time, called "The Asking Face."

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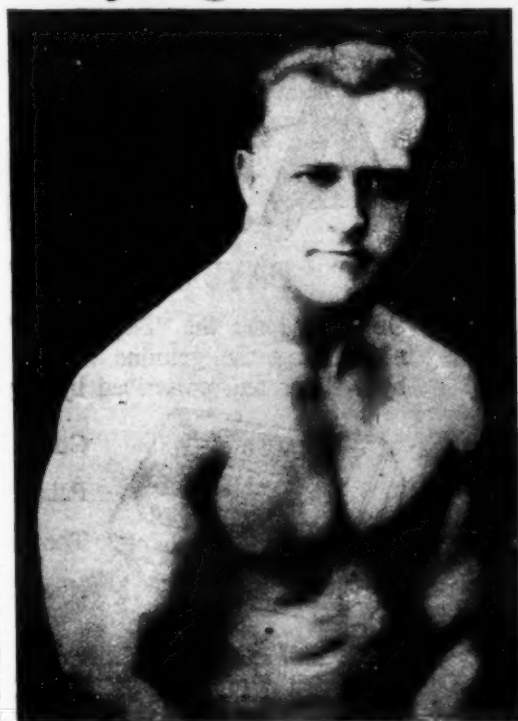
and I offered you something that would give you ten years more to live, would you take it? You'd grab it. Well, fellows, I've got it, but don't wait till you're dying or it won't do you a bit of good. It will then be too late. Right now is the time. To-morrow or any day, some disease will get you and if you have not equipped yourself to fight it off, you're gone. I don't claim to cure disease. I am not a medical doctor, but I'll put you in such condition that the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. Can you imagine a mosquito trying to bite a tick wall? A fine chance.

A Re-built Man

I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others. It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, sickly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't just give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set before you.

All I Ask Is Ninety Days

Who says it takes years to get in shape? Show me the man who makes any such claims and I'll make him eat his words. I'll put one full inch on your arm in just 30 days. Yes, and two full inches on your chest in the same length of time. Meanwhile, I'm putting life and pep into your old back-bone. And from then on, just watch 'em grow. At the end of thirty days you won't know yourself. Your whole body will take on an entirely different appearance. But you've only started. Now comes the real work. I've only built my foundation. I want just 60 days more (30 in all) and you'll look like something the cat dragged in.



Earle E. Liederman, The Muscle Builder

A Real Man

When I'm through with you, you're a real man. The kind that can prove it. You will be able to do things that you had thought impossible. And the beauty of it is you keep on going. Your deep full chest breathes in rich pure air, stimulating your blood and making you just bubble over with vim and vitality. Your huge square shoulders and your massive muscular arms have that craving for the exercise of a regular he-man. You have the flash to your eye and the pep to your step that will make you admired and sought after in both the business and social world. This is a little to brag, fellows. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Go ahead. I like it. I have already done this for thousands of others and my records are unchallenged. What I have done for them, I will do for you. Come then, for time flies and every day counts. Let this very day be the beginning of new life to you.

Send for my new 64-page book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It is FREE

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as stunted weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physique. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you from cover to cover. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is sent to keep. This will not oblige you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5011, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN

Dept. 5011, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents for which you are to send me, without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

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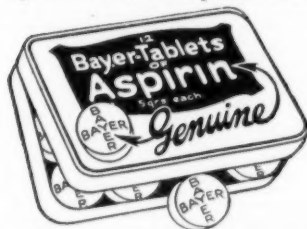
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Unless you see the "Bayer Cross" on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians 24 years for



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Accept only "Bayer" package which contains proven directions. Handy "Bayer" boxes of 12 tablets—Also bottles of 24 and 100—Druggists. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid.



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Sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons, often at the rate of a pound a day, without diet or exercise. Let me send you proof at my expense.

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Write today for my FREE Booklet, "A CLEAR TONE SKIN", telling how I cured myself of being afflicted for over fifteen years.
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SIMPLY send \$2.00 for the most sensational, price-smashing diamond ring ever made.
A perfectly cut, guaranteed, blue white, Gory diamond is set in an 18 Karat white gold cup; 1/4 Karat size. Latest design, hand engraved mounting.

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We take all chances—if you are not satisfied at the end of ten days for any reason whatsoever, return the diamond ring to us and your deposit will be refunded to you. Send only \$2.00, and receive this genuine steel blue white diamond ring exactly as illustrated; in a handsome gift box charges paid. A legal guarantee bond as to quality and value accompanies each ring. After ten days' trial pay balance \$6.96 a month for twelve months. Price only \$78.96.

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—all the difference
between just an ordinary cigarette
and—FATIMA, the most skillful
blend in cigarette history.

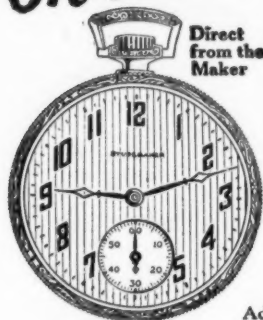
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8

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Only \$1.00 down buys the
famous Studebaker Insured Watch
direct from the factory at the low
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Has 21 Jewels—8 adjustments—and is insured for the
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Will Pylorhea claim you, too?
Make Forhan's your aid

Pylorhea plays no favorites. Records prove that it has marked for its own four out of every five over forty years of age, and thousands younger. Heed Nature's warning—tender, bleeding gums—before it's too late. Better still, check Pylorhea before it starts by going to your dentist regularly—and brushing your teeth twice a day with Forhan's For the Gums.

At all druggists—35c and 60c.

Forhan's

FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste—
it checks Pylorhea



FREE

Pearls!

SPECIAL OFFER

To those who rush their order for any of these diamond rings or this wrist watch, we will give absolutely free this twenty-four inch indestructible iridescent pearl necklace with a 14 karat solid white gold clasp set with a **GENUINE DIAMOND**. This offer is made to a limited number of new customers only. Don't pass up this rare opportunity.

GENUINE DIAMONDS

Each of these rings is set with a fiery, perfect cut, blue white, genuine diamond of first quality. Rings are of exclusive and charming design. **GUARANTEE** Diamond bond with each ring.

\$2.00
Down

Just send \$2 and ring or watch you select together with the **FREE** pearls will be sent to you. Keep both for ten day's free trial. If you do not feel you have received more than your money's worth, send both articles back and your \$2 will be cheerfully refunded. If you feel, as we do, that this is the **biggest bargain ever offered**, simply pay \$2.50 a week until balance is paid. Be sure to order rings by numbers.

NO RISK—

EASY TO PAY

Did you ever see an offer as remarkable as this? Free pearls, not out a cent if dissatisfied, easy to pay if satisfied. You will be the proud possessor of a beautiful diamond ring or watch and pearl necklace without ever missing the money.

No. A41

18k. white gold diamond ring, solitaire and engraved.
\$45.00

No. B41

Seven diamonds set in platinum, secure brace \$200 value. 14 k. gold ring.
\$57.50

No. C41

Man's diamond ring 14 k. gold, 18 k. white gold top.
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High grade solid 14 k. white gold watch. Guaranteed 10 jewel adjusted movement. Accurate time.
Only **\$29.50**

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De Luxe Bargain Catalog. Diamonds, watches, and jewelry of rare beauty from \$10 to \$1000. Large stock of wonderful values to select from. Send for your free copy today.

Established 1890

Write Dept. H-41

BAER BROS. Co.

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LOFTIS BROS. & CO. 1842

DIAMONDS WATCHES

DIAMONDS for GIFTS **Genuine Diamonds Guaranteed** WATCHES for GIFTS **CASH or CREDIT**

The Best Christmas Gift of All

No. 68 \$3.75 A Week	No. 55 \$7.50 A Week	No. 27 \$2.50 A Week	No. 20 \$5.00 A Week	No. 69 \$1.75 A Week
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The Diamonds in these Rings are brilliant, Fine White, high-grade Quality Gems. Mountings are Solid 18-k White Gold, except No. 20, which is Platinum.

Send for Christmas Catalog

Make worth-while Christmas presents—a Genuine Diamond, Watch, Wrist Watch, Pearl Necklace, Silverware, etc. Select as many articles as you wish from our Catalog and have all charged in one account. Sent prepaid for your free examination. Catalog explains everything. Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Refunded.

CREDIT TERMS: Goods delivered on first payment of one-tenth of purchase price; balance in equal amounts, payable weekly, semi-monthly or monthly at your convenience.

No. 48—Wrist Watch, 18-k White Gold, 17 Jewels, Green Gold, en-
graved, Assorted designs.
Jewels, \$40. Delivered on first payment of \$3.00, \$1.00 A WEEK.
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graved, Assorted designs.
Jewels, \$40. Delivered on first payment of \$3.00, \$1.00 A WEEK.

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M. Triety's latest improved Nose Shaper, Model No. 25, corrects now all ill-shaped noses quickly, painlessly, permanently, and comfortably at home.

It is the only safe and guaranteed patent device that will actually give you a perfect looking nose. Over 87,000 satisfied users. For years recommended by physicians.

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No bothersome straps to be pulled, but a fine, light, comfortable appliance with 6 movable regulators which guarantee a perfect correction. His is the oldest, largest and best reputed business of its kind in this country. Avoid cheap, worthless imitations. If you wish to have a perfect looking nose, ask for his latest catalog on "How To Correct Ill-Shaped Noses." Without cost if not satisfactory. Write to the Pioneer Nose-shaping Specialist, M. Triety, Dept. 216, Binghamton, N. Y.

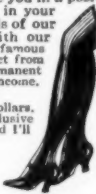


I Want 700 Agents At \$90.00 a week

Men and Women! Write me today and by this time next week I can place you in a position to make \$2.00 to \$5.00 an hour in your spare time, up to \$15 a day full time. Thousands of our representatives are making that and more with our New Plans. Simply introduce and take orders for famous World's Star Hosiery and Underwear sold direct from mail to home—a complete line for whole family. Permanent customers and repeat orders make you steady, big income. No delivering or collecting. No capital required.

Write Quick It's a chance to make thousands of dollars. Your profits begin at once. Exclusive territory. No experience needed. Write today and I'll send all facts and tell how to start **Free**.

(Established 29 years.)
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STUART'S PLAPAD-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adjusting purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. No straps, buckles or sewing attached—cannot slip, so as not chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Sold as velvet—easy to apply—Inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for truss. We give it by sending Trial of Plapad absolutely **FREE**. Write name on Coupon and send TODAY. **Plapad Co. 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.**

Name.....
Address.....
Enclose mail will bring Free Trial Plapad.....



We Want Agents at \$50 to \$90 a Week

New Invention—Just out. Needed in every home every day. Patented. Nothing else like it. Low priced—Sells on sight. Sharpens any kitchen knife, paring knife, carving knife, bread knife, or shears and scissors in **ten seconds**. Mechanical masterpiece. A child can use it. Just put knife in slot—turn crank—sharpens both sides at once automatically. We want representatives at once—men and women hustlers. Get this position where profits start first day.

No Experience Necessary—200% Profit

Make as much money next week as these men are making now. J. C. Lewis, of Kansas, says: "I have sold one hundred sharpeners in four days." Robert Kerr, of Md., writes: "The women can hardly wait till they get them." Herbert Cain, of Ky., sold nine after supper. At the end of the first day, J. W. Gordon, of Pa., writes: "I sold two dozen and I sold to every one I saw." Wm. G. Hall, of N. J., says: "I think it is great. I sold six in about one-half hour. The machine is a mighty fine proposition. I am a mechanic and I know what I am talking about." You can make this money. **WRITE TODAY. TERRITORY FREE.** Get busy at once.

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At the office
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Beeman's —
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its use is
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In Business Nearly 100 years

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MILES ON AIR**

An automobile goes 27 miles on air by using an automatic
device which was installed in less than 5 minutes. The auto-
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Be in demand at parties, dances, shows, lodges,
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With our free course of instruction, we
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Cuticura
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Mild and Soothing to Tender Skin



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Seven brilliant, blue white, perfectly cut diamonds are set in platinum. Looks like 2 ct. solitaire worth \$600. Fully guaranteed to stand any test.

TWO BLUE SAPPHIRES are set in the shanks of this 18 kt. solid white gold engraved and pierced ring to add beauty and style.

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1/4 Carat	\$25.00	1/2 Carat	\$147.75
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1/4 " "	\$73.50	1/2 " "	\$246.25
1/4 " "	\$97.75	1/2 " "	\$295.50
1/4 " "	\$122.00	1/2 " "	\$344.75

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Just send your handwriting, full birth date with 10c for postage and this amazing information will be sent to you at once. Print your name and address to avoid delay in mailing. Write now and Good Fortune will be Yours.

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Why look with envy on such youthful, supple forms? You can keep your own excess weight down, and restore the girliness of your own figure without exercise or starvation diets. There is at last "a royal road to keeping slimmer." Try.

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FAT REDUCING CREAM

Results Guaranteed or No Pay

ANN PENNINGTON, of the Ziegfeld Follies says: "I am overjoyed with my DAINTY-FORM reducing cream. Its use has helped me to become slender." EVELYN NEVILLE'S DAINTY-FORM is endorsed by physicians and will be sent direct to your home in plain wrapper upon receipt of \$2.00 the jar or \$3.50 for double size, plus 10 cents postage.

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200% PROFIT

or more. 9 out of 10 women buy. Produces keen edge quickly. Sells for 50c.

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No more steel springs, weighty cushions, or chafing leg straps. Making new kind of support, weighing less than 1-25 of an ounce, prevents coming out of rupture, which leads too often to strapping devices. Offered to ruptured people on a guarantee of human satisfaction or no cost. Free details if you will simply drop us a postcard or letter with your address, to NEW SCIENCE INSTITUTE, 4806 Clay Street, Steubenville, Ohio.

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No Work—Just Fun

Write for 50 Sets St. Nicholas Christmas Seals. Sell for 10c a set. When sold send us \$3.00 and keep \$2.00. No Work—Just Fun!

ST. NICHOLAS SEAL CO., 2814 Glenwood Road, Dept. 105, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Sea Stories Magazine

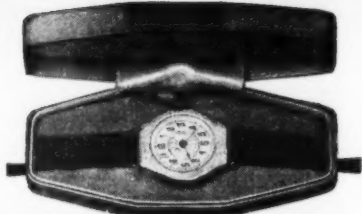
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 25 year 14 kt. white gold filled wrist watch.
 Tonnage shape. Supplise crown, silk grosgrain ribbon with
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is soothing to your stump,—strong,
 cool, neat, light. Guaranteed 5
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 Too good to be true? Yet
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 16-Yard Bundles for only
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Ring Watch

Be one of the first to wear this tiny
 ladies' Ring Watch. New shape, cut
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 Full jeweled movement, fully guar-
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 Surprise your friends. Order now!
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 Watch gray streaks disappear and beau-
 tiful, even, natural color return. No
 streaks or discoloration, no "dyed" look.

I perfected my wonderful restorer
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 color in my own prematurely gray hair.
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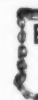


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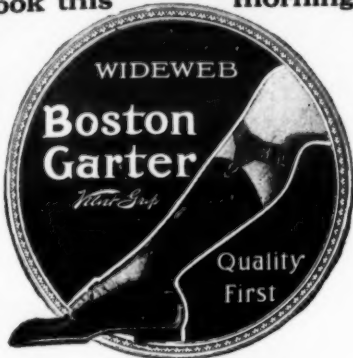
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G. Washington's Coffee is wonderful for preparing desserts, ices, jellies, cakes, candies and other dainties. By simply adding G. Washington's Coffee to other ingredients, a delicious coffee flavor is obtained. It comes in concentrated powdered form and no water is required. Its use in desserts is simplicity itself and results are certain.

If you can make good cake, a new dessert or confection, enter this contest, which is limited to those who have used G. Washington's Coffee prior to September 1, 1924.

\$1,000 in cash prizes for new G. Washington's Coffee recipes. First prize is \$500. No restrictions, no conditions.

LIST OF PRIZES

For G. Washington's Coffee New Recipes

For the best	\$500
For the next best	250
For the next best	75
For the next best	50
For the next best	25
For the 20 next best, \$5 each	100
Twenty-five prizes in all	\$1,000

Contest Closes Dec. 31, 1924

All prizes will be paid on or before February 1st, 1925, and in event of tie for any prize offered, the full amount of such prize will be awarded to tying contestants.



The judges of the contest will be chosen from a selected list of managers and famous chefs of the leading hotels of New York City.

Write recipe on one side of paper only. No letters can be answered concerning the contest. All recipes must be mailed on or before December 31, 1924, and to become our property.

Use the coupon below, or a copy of it, attaching your suggestions for new recipes.

COUPON

G. Washington Coffee Refining Co.,
522 Fifth Ave., New York City, Contest Dept. No. 7.
Enclosed find recipes for using G. Washington's Coffee.

Name.....
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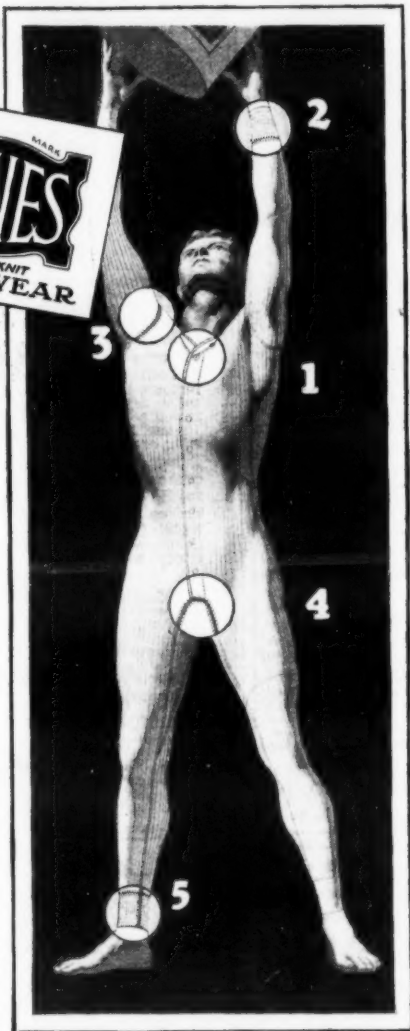
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HANES Collarettes are cut to size. A 40 suit has a 40 collarette. Won't roll or pucker. Protect the chest from cold draughts, and let the top-shirt lie smooth.

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HANES Cuffs won't pull off. They snug the wrist. Reinforced on the end to prevent raveling and sagging. Sleeves are exact length—not uneven.

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HANES Elastic Shoulders give with every movement, because they're made with a service-doubling top seam. Comfortable. Strong.

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HANES Closed Crotch really STAYS closed. Double gusset in thigh another comfort feature. Crotch can't bind, for HANES is fitted by TRUNK measurement, as well as chest.

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HANES Elastic Ankles never bunch over the shoe-tops. No ugly pucker showing under the socks. One leg is exactly the same length as the other. They're mates!



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MAKE your own specifications. Put in all the things good winter underwear should have to suit you. Put a price on it that is below what you would expect to pay for such underwear. Then go to the HANES dealer and see the very suit of underwear you have in mind!

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HANES comfort is real. And HANES wear matches HANES comfort. The red label is a definite guarantee that every thread, stitch and button will give the kind of service you have a right to demand, or your money back. Buy HANES this winter! Union suits, also shirts-and-drawers. Three weights. We especially recommend the HANES Heavy Weight for all practical purposes.

Boys can also write their own ticket. HANES Boys' Underwear is made of the same materials and with the same care. Union suits only. Two weights—heavy and extra heavy. Sizes 2 to 16 years. 2 to 4 year sizes with drop seats. Also knee length and short sleeves.

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